

KENNETH STARR'S DIRTY DEALINGS

April 29-May 12, 1996

IN THESE TIMES

A PALER SHADE OF GREEN

CLINTON'S
ECO-DUPLCITY

DAVID HELVARG

LOW-LEVEL
RADIATION,
HIGH-LEVEL LIES

GAYLE GREENE

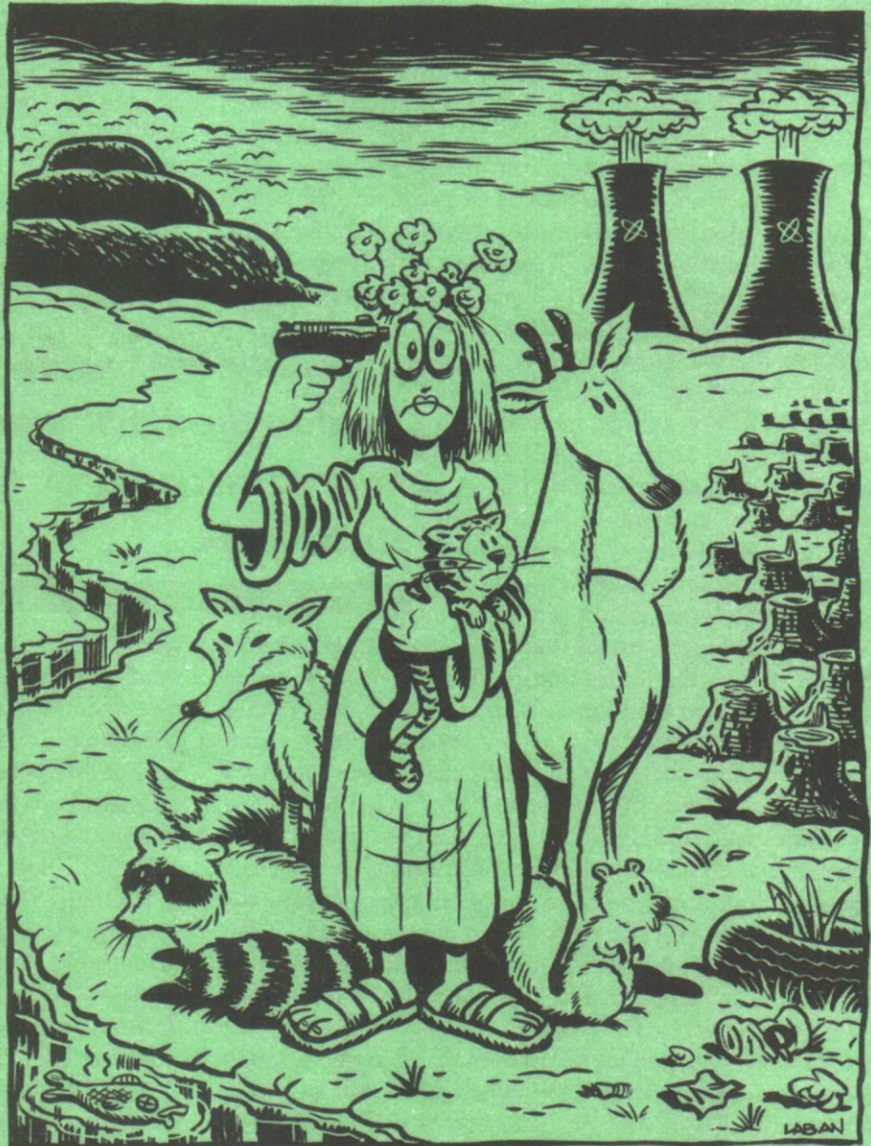
PRIMING
THE PUMP FOR
DIRTIER GAS

WILL NIXON

THE POLITICAL
FALLOUT OF
CHERNOBYL

JAY M. GOULD

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E D I T O R I A L

HOW TO SAVE SOCIAL SECURITY

It was only a year or so ago that congressional leaders were predicting an end to annual surpluses in the Social Security fund in the year 2002. The surplus, which is the amount of money raised by Social Security taxes each year less the amount paid out in benefits, has been running at more than \$50 billion a year. Until recently, conservative analysts called for cuts in benefit payments, or reductions in the annual adjustments made to compensate for inflation, with the scare tactic of predicting the fund's exhaustion soon after the annual surplus turned to a deficit at the turn of the century. They based their prediction on projections that the economy would grow by only 1.5 percent a year in the next decade, a figure far below normal. Now, however, federal officials have revised their estimates. Outlays will not exceed income until 2020, they say, and trust fund reserves will not be used up until 2030.

This game, as Doug Henwood has argued in *Left Business Observer*, could go on indefinitely, in which case the Social Security crisis would simply serve as a political ploy to attack social benefits. But whether or not this is true, the fact is that the Social Security surplus, an insurance fund paid for by working people, is not being protected but is being used as if it were general revenue. This means that the real federal deficit is greater than we are told by the extent of the Social Security fund surplus—or by upwards of \$50 billion each year. Instead of being saved or invested in something socially useful, the surplus is being paid out mostly in the form of military spending and interest on the national debt. When congressional leaders and the White House talk about a balanced budget, they really mean a budget that is running a deficit that equals the fund surplus.

That is why the public rightly fears that if annual surpluses turn into deficits, the trillion dollars or so that should be in reserve will be gone, and that benefits will then have to be paid for with money raised by additional income taxes. Or, worse, they fear that the fund will simply go bust and

that they will never get the benefits they paid for over a working lifetime.

These fears are the unspoken political reality that underlie last month's report of the Advisory Council on Social Security, which called for a portion of Social Security payroll taxes to be invested in the stock market. The council, appointed in 1994 by Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, includes business executives, union leaders and pension experts. They all agreed that investing in the private market was a good idea but were divided on whether individual Social Security participants should be able to make their own investment decisions, or whether the

surplus should be kept in one big pool to be managed by federal officials.

No member of the Senate panel challenged the council's basic assumption. As Sen. John Breaux (D-LA) said, there was "agreement that the trust fund could be invested in equities. The question is, who controls those investments?"

We have also called for investment of the surplus in the market. We did so for three reasons: First, because that is the only practical way to protect the surplus. Second, because doing so would force Congress to stop lying about the cost of entitlements paid for by Social Security taxes. As is obvious from the above, most of those entitlements not

Investing the Social Security fund in the stock market is the only practical way to preserve its surplus.

only pay for themselves, but generate a surplus now being used for other purposes. By taking Social Security and Medicare payments out of the budget, the true priorities of our political leaders

would be revealed to the public. And, third, because the fund surplus could be used in part for socially desirable investment, including such things as low-cost mortgages for affordable single-family, cooperative or other housing, as well as for bonds to pay for municipal transit and other infrastructure improvements and for renewable forms of energy and other environmentally sound activities.

The principle underlying such investment should not be to maximize return on the surplus. That is what the advisory council declares as its goal, but it is unnecessary and inadvisable. And the investments should certainly not be made by individuals, but by some appointed body whose decisions are subject to full public scrutiny and congressional oversight.

The benefits of such a plan are obvious. The left should enter this debate with such a program, rather than simply sitting on the sidelines and naysaying while the political process passes us by. ◀

IN THESE TIMES
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InTHESETIMES

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L E T T E R S

Point/counterpoint

As a graduate of New York University's journalism program, I never imagined that I would someday have to teach the department's chairman a thing or two about the profession. But I'm happy to do it—free of tuition.

• Rule No. 1: Unless you are working undercover, don't misrepresent yourself. I agreed to meet with NYU's William Serrin ("Hacks and hatchet jobs," February 19) nearly a year ago, after he said he was writing a story for the *Columbia Journalism Review*. He never mentioned (then or later) that he was writing instead for your leftist publication. During our lunch, he gave every indication that he agreed with my coverage of Teamster boss Ron Carey in *Time* magazine. Of course, I wasn't completely buying it: A flattering story on Carey, written by Serrin in another leftist publication in 1990, was a good indication of where he stood even before his most recent assignment.

• Rule No. 2: Don't misquote your source, particularly if you fail at force-feeding him the phrase. I never told Serrin that Carey is "fair game." Several years ago, I authored a cover story on an organization whose written "fair game" policy calls for the abuse and even the destruction of its critics. Consequently, I have come to view the very phrase as repugnant. I would never have uttered it. In fact, I specifically recall Serrin using the phrase in his questions.

• Rule No. 3: Don't ignore evidence just because it gets in the way of your hypothesis. Serrin trumpets a 1994 report by the Independent Review Board (IRB)—spearheaded by retired judge Fred Lacey—as proof that Carey is exonerated and that scores of journalists were duped. In fact, while the report cleared Carey of Mob ties, it criticized him for dishonesty in his real estate dealings. This fact alone, ignored by Serrin, as well as the numerous leads unpursued and wit-

nesses not interviewed, should raise a red flag in anyone's mind about Carey and the IRB probe.

More important, Serrin conveniently ignored any mention of my last story on the subject: a May 15, 1995 *Time* article that raised questions about Judge Lacey's impartiality.

Specifically, *Time* had obtained a private letter, written by Lacey amid (that's A-M-I-D) his investigation of Carey. The letter was threatening to go public with materials linking Carey to the Mob.

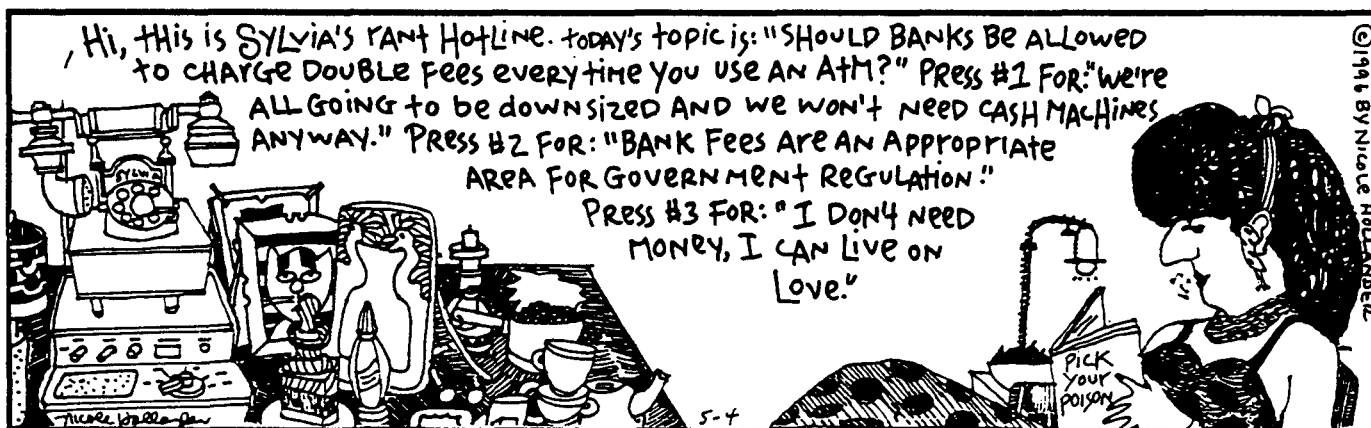
One man who links Carey to the Mob is Alfonse D'Arco, the former acting boss of the Lucchese crime family. Serrin pooch-poochs him as a criminal who has confessed to 10 killings. So what? Sammy Gravano is a bigger killer and his testimony has brought down scores of mobsters, including John Gotti. Moreover, as I pointed out in *Time* (also ignored by Serrin), D'Arco is considered the government's best Mob witness. If D'Arco is lying about Carey, as I wrote in 1993, his credibility as a witness is badly damaged. And if he's telling the truth, the credibility of the government is in question for sitting on hot information that was gleaned just weeks after Carey took office the year before. Either way, the feds are in a pickle.

For these reasons, among others, the House Judiciary Committee is now investigating Lacey's handling of the Carey matter, a development also ignored by Serrin.

• Rule No. 4: If you believe you're

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



onto a conspiracy, make damn sure your dates jibe. Serrin writes that many reporters were hoodwinked by a conspiracy of three sources (Leebove-Geller-Moroney)—two of whom are clear backers of Jimmy Hoffa—and that the trio “began to produce results in December 1992” with a story of mine in *Time*. But I never had a conversation with (or received information from) any of these men until 1993. In addition, as I told Serrin, I viewed them as critically as I view any source who may have an ax to grind. Serrin implies that I and other reporters have given Hoffa favorable coverage. In fact, my first story on the Teamsters in *Time* was critical of both Carey and Hoffa. My second story (1992) raised the same questions about Carey and the Mob that Judge Lacey seemed to entertain; but the piece was also complimentary about some of Carey’s actions and successes.

◦ Rule No. 5: If you link people in a conspiracy, give them a courtesy call. In the aftermath of Serrin’s story, I communicated with Mr. Geller (uh-oh, more proof of a conspiracy), who you named as part of the trio that hoodwinked the press. According to Geller, he has never even been contacted by Serrin. If true, this is shoddy journalistic behavior, and it sets a bad example for all of Serrin’s students at NYU.

Richard Behar
Senior Writer, *Fortune* magazine
New York City

William Serrin responds: Richard Behar is a journalist who constructs stories on shoddy evidence, who takes leaps with the truth, who piles on. He has an ego as large as the fanciful tales he constructs. I was made particularly curious by the red-baiting in his letter. He says I wrote for “a leftist publication,” In *These Times*, and, previously, for “another leftist publication,” *The Nation*. Funny. I would not write a letter saying that he writes for a business-oriented magazine, *Fortune*, or, previously, for a middle-of-the-road magazine, recently much influenced by the celebrity journalism of *People* magazine, *Time* magazine.

◦ Point No. 1: I did not work undercover. I approached Columbia Journalism Review to do the story, and was assigned to do so. After I spent much work and time on the story, CJR rejected it. There was a big fight at a West Side lunch, I was told, with some editors for the story, some against it. I then asked In *These Times* if it would be interested in a Carey story. In *These Times* said yes; I then reworked the story and ITT accepted and published it. Why CJR is not much interested in union or working-class stories is for CJR to explain, although I suspect that, like most American newspapers or magazines, top editors at CJR do not consider unions or working-class people important. Finally, I never said to Behar that I agreed with his take on Carey. He just assumed I did. He was sitting there all puffed up: I was taking notes and eating my fish.

◦ Point No. 2: I quoted Behar accurately.

◦ Point No. 3: Don’t be silly. The report exonerating Carey was prepared by a former federal district judge, a respected West Virginia labor lawyer and a former director of the FBI. Hardly Teamster supporters or left-wingers. Hardly a cover-up. Readers should know that, since the issuance of the report, only Behar, alone among the mainstream journalists who attacked Carey for so long, continued to write critically of Carey. The rest, following the report, gave up. (Of course, none said that any of their reports had been simply wrong or hyped.)

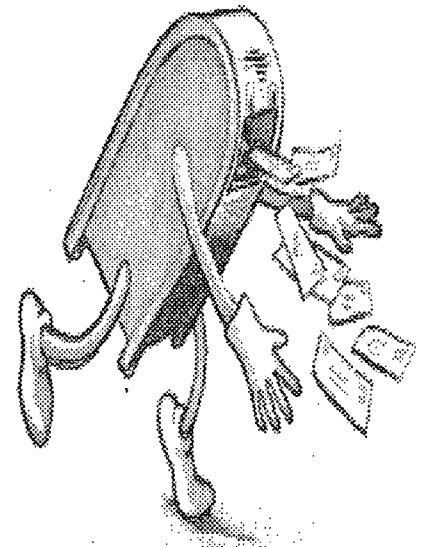
I am reasonably well-read and was aware of Behar’s story in *Time* concerning the letter from Judge Lacey to Thomas Puccio regarding Puccio, who has made a small fortune as a court-appointed Teamster trustee, and Puccio’s wild-eyed assistant, Michael Moroney. I couldn’t get it in a story that was already being cut. Readers should also be aware that Moroney was forced out. He did not resign.

◦ Point No. 4: It’s nice to see Behar confess that Geller, Leebove and Moroney are sources of his. He wasn’t

owning up to that, in any substantial way, when I talked to him.

◦ Point No. 5: I called Geller a number of times. He never returned my calls.

Inquiring readers, finally, should ask themselves—as Behar should—whether, given all that is going on in this world, and how *Time* interprets that world, Carey is worth so many stories. Was Behar practicing good journalism, or was he determined to find evil, engaging in a witch-hunt? Behar, simply put, is one of those so-called investigative journalists who cannot believe that someone is innocent, that somewhere someone is doing good. I wonder if *Time* misses him.



Grudge match

Beginning in the late '80s, *In These Times* fell into a financial sinkhole. For years it failed to pay contributors and, in a desperation move, it shifted publication schedule from weekly to fortnightly. To this day ITT bounces checks to writers. Why the fiscal crisis? Because readers have uniformly rejected the obsessive, grudge-driven muckraking of Joel Bleifuss, the racist victimology of Salim Muwakkil, the pseudo-Marxist femi-

Continued on page 34

InSHORT



THE PERILS OF PRIVATIZATION

Workers at one of the earliest Russian factories privatized in the four-year-old market reforms say the experience has been a disaster and the company should be returned to state ownership.

The demand by the workers at ZiL, a huge Moscow plant that manufactured heavy trucks for the army and limousines for the elite, has sparked a tough election-year debate over the direction of Russia's hastily privatized and deeply

troubled industrial economy.

"Privatization solved nothing for us," says Mikhail Alliluyev, trade union leader of ZiL's 60,000 workforce. "It only changed the signboard over our tragedy. We are asking the government to re-nationalize us."

Four years ago, in the first flush of post-Soviet euphoria, ZiL's workers voted to wrench free from state control, becoming one of Russia's first privately held companies.

Since going private, ZiL's production of trucks has slumped from 150,000 annually to only 13,000 last year. Almost 40 percent of the workforce has been laid off, and the company has racked up debts of 800 billion rubles (\$12 million).

In February, the workers, who hold 35 percent of ZiL's stock, held a meeting and voted overwhelmingly to petition the Russian government to take back control. Alliluyev argues the state, which built ZiL and fostered a dependent workforce, is obligated to help the plant prepare for the new world.

In the past two years, more than 70 percent of Russian industry has passed into private hands, the largest such shift in history and one that has been

hailed around the world as a triumph of reform.

But the problems at ZiL suggest privatization merely papered over the deep crisis of Russian industry. Today, much of the Soviet Union's scientific and technical infrastructure is disintegrating, along with the physical plant that is Russia's major claim to being a modern aspirant to First World status.

Even President Boris Yeltsin has admitted "serious mistakes" were

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This innuendo just in...

WORLD NEWS TONIGHT REPORTER BRIAN ROSS AND PRODUCER DAVE ROMMEL could use a course in remedial journalism. ABC's April 5 news report contrived a link between Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski and the radical environmental group Earth First! ABC alleged that two of the Unabomber's victims were on a hit list published by what ABC described as a "radical environmental journal." The report then cut to an interview with an editor at *Earth First! Journal*. The only problem is Earth First! has never published such a list. ABC was, in fact, referring to the "Eco-Fuckers Hit List" that was published by *Live Wild or Die*, a journal of eco-anarchist thought.

ABC also charged that Kaczynski had been at a University of Montana "meeting attended by top Earth First! members" in November 1994. In fact, the event, sponsored by the Native Forest Network, a grass-roots environmental group, was attended by more than 400 people. Moreover, Kaczynski's attendance at the conference is not certain—his name does not appear on the FBI's list of conference participants. And that raises a question ABC doesn't begin to address: What is the FBI doing tracking attendance at environmental conferences? —Joel Bleffuss



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APPALL-O-METER

IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



Heck of a thing 7.6

When their parents left town for the weekend, two Fort Lauderdale youths decided to take mom's red Mercedes—and some blow-darts—for a night of fun, the Associated Press reports. The night wasn't quite as much fun for Edward Chapman, a 54-year-old black man who was out bicycling when he was shot in the back with a 3-inch dart. Police say the attack was a hate crime; the kids' attorney says it was just a bit of "drunken stupidity."

According to Pompano Beach police, one of the teens also admitted that they had planned to "pop ... out and shoot ... some niggers" on the night in question. Now, though, the two say they're "sincerely sorry" about the dart-shoot-out—and hope it won't be held against them. "What you have here is bright kids, honor-roll kids, both of them good athletes," their attorney,

Bo Hitchcock, explained. "They just got into a heck of a thing."

No sex please 7.4

China's Communist Party has announced itself firmly opposed to contemporary naughtiness, UPI reports. *The People's Daily*, the Party organ, charges that many old works have been retitled to give them new prurient appeal. For example, a book originally titled "The Lives of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin" has been spotted with the new title "The Four Most Attractive Men." Meanwhile, in Peru, the government's new Methodological Guide to Sexual Education has come under attack by the archbishop of Ayacucho, UPI reports. The archbishop claims the guide was written "by strange people who have infiltrated the Education Ministry" trying to encourage "homosexual and erotic children."

Among the guide's sins: it discusses contraception, homosexuality and the notion of non-traditional families.

All-thumbs tax 4.6

In the American tax code, loopholes are generally meant to apply only to special cases, like truly needy campaign contributors. But in Poland, the *Los Angeles Times* reports, one loophole has opened up into something close to a gaping chasm. The new tax provision is so poorly worded that now almost anything bought for another can be claimed as a charitable deduction—and potential auditors can't demand receipts. One unofficial calculation suggests that if everyone were to take full advantage of the law, it would cost the government some \$2 billion—about half of Poland's annual deficit. Finance Minister Grzegorz Kolodko is hoping that God Himself will help with the auditing. "He who doesn't pay taxes commits a sin," Kolodko told the press. "Even saying three 'Hail Marys' will not exonerate him."

trolling interest in Siberia's huge Norilsk nickel complex after offering just \$100,000 above the minimum bid of \$170 million. Uneximbank had been retained by the State Property Committee to supervise the same auction, and in that capacity it rejected a bid of more than \$300 million from a rival bank, Rossiskiy Kredit, citing a technicality.

Recent press reports feature workers at the new acquisition, Norilsk Nickel, complaining they haven't received their wages in months. That gives them something in common with another company Uneximbank owns a piece of—ZiL.

Russia's resurgent Communists—whose leader, Gennady Zyuganov, tops opinion polls in advance of the June presidential elections—say privatization of strategic industries like ZiL was a mistake that should be reversed.

However, if simply changing ownership gives no guarantee that fresh ideas or desperately needed investment will flow in, re-nationalization by a near-bankrupt state doesn't offer much of an alternative. "We believed new owners would bring in fresh ideas and capital to make our plant viable in the world marketplace," says Sabir Alejev, a 46-year-old engineer who has worked at ZiL since 1974. "But it has only ruined us."

Hundreds of privatized Russian plants remain mired in debt, saddled with outdated technology and cut off from their traditional Soviet-era markets. According to one recent estimate, 40 percent of Russian industries are effectively bankrupt. "The dilemma is acute," admits Igor Plotnikov of the Russian government's property and privatization commission.

Russia has two equally unpalatable options, he says. One is for the state to take companies like ZiL back under its wing and absorb the high cost of modernizing and restructuring. Or it can let them go bankrupt and face the social and political consequences of turning millions of workers into the street.

"There is really no way out," Plotnikov says. "We can't afford either solution."

—Fred Weir

made in the wholesale sell-off of Russia's state assets. In January, he fired the architect of privatization, Anatoly Chubais, citing massive corruption in last autumn's "loans for shares" scheme. That sell-off—originally intended to ease the government's enormous budget deficit—wound up putting many key industries, such as oil, gas, steel and chemicals, under the control of a handful of banks that supervised many of the sales.

These sorts of transactions are becoming business as usual across the new Russian economy. Experts estimate that about 30 large financial

industrial groups (FIGs) have combined infant banking capital with strong official patronage to occupy the commanding heights of Russian industry. Supporters applaud the FIGs as the first sign of Russian multinational corporations emerging from the post-Soviet malaise. But critics worry the FIGs may bring all the pathologies of modern corporate culture to Russia without fostering even narrowly based new development.

One of the big winners in the "loan for shares" game was Uneximbank, reputedly linked to inner Kremlin circles, which acquired a 3 percent con-

UNSAFE HOUSES

President Bill Clinton's latest election-year lurch to the right may leave some poor families homeless. In an effort to fight crime in public housing, Clinton has introduced guidelines for evicting those accused of drug-related or violent crimes—after a single offense. Dubbing it a “one strike and you’re out” measure, Clinton summed up its guiding logic during his January State of the Union address: Housing, he announced, “is a right and not a privilege.”

That certainly has been the recent trend. Federal laws enabling housing authorities to evict criminal residents have been in place since 1988. In fact, some local housing authorities have already instituted their own one-strike policies. But in order to combat what Clinton calls “spotty enforcement” of the eviction measures, the Department of Housing and Urban Development is establishing a grading process that assesses the effectiveness of local housing authorities in reducing crime. Low scorers could lose federal funds and fall under closer government scrutiny. The new policy is the latest attempt by a desperate HUD to make itself relevant to congressional right-wingers, who last year threatened to dismantle the agency until director Henry Cisneros promised to “reinvent” it.

Housing advocates say Clinton and

HUD are sacrificing the well-being of poor families—for whom public housing is a last resort and not a first choice—to save themselves. “HUD knows that Congress does not like public housing,” says Othello Poulard of the Washington-based Center for Community Change. “[The one-strike rule] is a policy proposal emerging from that knowledge.”

Critics point to serious procedural problems with the rule, as well. It does not, for example, require a conviction before the eviction. “What happened to ‘innocent until proven guilty?’” Poulard asks. “As written, the policy puts the burden of proof on the resident, even if the resident is innocent. It does not put any burden on housing authorities.”

Then there’s the question of guilt by association: The “one strike” plan will enable authorities to put an entire family on the street because of one member’s action—or alleged action. Some communities that currently follow the policy have already seen this happen. David Bryson, deputy director of the National Housing Law Project in Los Angeles, cites the case of the Patterson family in Charlotte, N.C. “A son murdered somebody, and was tried and convicted,” Bryson says, “and [authorities] tried to evict the family. The housing authority’s argument was that when the family had moved into the home, they had signed a covenant agreeing that no one in the family would commit crimes.”

The Pattersons eventually won their eviction challenge. But other families

seeking to fight evictions in court might not be so lucky—the new HUD guidelines call for housing authorities to establish relationships with local judges who hear housing cases.

HUD officials “feel that the judges should not hesitate to be sympathetic to housing authorities,” says Bryson. “The document actually says that housing authorities should meet with judges to soften them up. And they’re very careful. [HUD] tells them not to go to judges on pending cases. But if a housing authority goes in to see a judge one day, then there’s a case the next day, what’s the difference?”

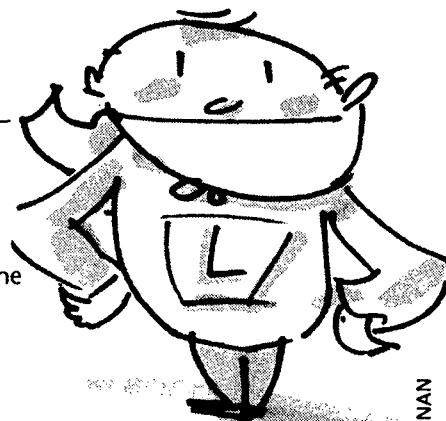
Sharon Bush, an organizer with the New York chapter of ACORN, believes the lack of protections for the innocent and families of the guilty reflects the one-strike policy’s ultimate aim. “If they try a person and find him guilty first, then he goes to jail, so there’s no need of eviction,” she says. “You don’t evict a family from housing.”

“But they’re looking to put people out of public housing altogether,” she adds. “The Republicans feel that poor people shouldn’t have a place. Of course, there’s a serious problem with crime in public housing, but this won’t deter crime.” If anything, she says, “putting people out of their homes would create crime.”

—Leah Samuel

Reviving the “L” word

FOLLOWING THE LEAD OF THE RIGHT’S CONTRACT WITH AMERICA, THE PROGRESSIVE group Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) has set out to draft a “Liberal Platform for the 21st Century.” A host of Democratic reps, including Barney Frank (MA), Patsy Mink (CA), Cynthia McKinney (GA), Maurice Hinchey (NY), Bernie Sanders (VT), Maxine Waters (CA) and Jerrold Nadler (NY)—all of whom are members of the House Progressive Caucus—gathered at an April 25 hearing on Capitol Hill. Topics covered at the hearing ranged from economic issues and child welfare to international issues and strategies for building new liberal coalitions. The hearing will supply the basis for a progressive platform that the ADA national convention will adopt in June and submit to the platform committee of the 1996 Democratic National Convention. —Joel Bleifuss



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A priceless paper

The *Village Voice* became "the newspaper that can't be bought" two weeks ago, when it switched over to free distribution in Manhattan. No longer on the newsstand, the *Voice* now can be found in red plastic boxes on street corners, and in the entrances of stores like Tower Records. By the end of the *Voice*'s first week as a freebie, nearly all of its 150,000 copies were gone.

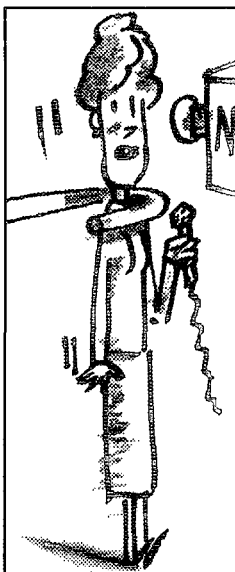
The *Voice*'s decision to boost its lagging circulation by going free drew a good deal of criticism from those who insisted that editorial quality, rather than the price tag, was the source of the *Voice*'s woes. The *Voice* is responding with a good dose of humor: The cover of the first free issue sported a colorful assortment of cartoon characters, all parroting the attacks that ran in other papers. "It's an act of pure desperation!" chirps one martini-drinking character. The *Voice* printed a different cover for Brooklyn and Queens, where it still sells for \$1.25.

Meanwhile, in a strange ideological pairing, the city's other free weekly, the quasi-libertarian *New York Press*, is hoping to cut into the *Voice*'s market with its newest recruit, *Nation* columnist (and former *Voice* staff writer) Alexander Cockburn, who has begun a column for the *Press*.

Unequal broadcasting

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) wants to change its equal employment rules, dropping the requirement that TV and radio stations document their efforts to recruit women and minorities. The FCC adopted the employment rules

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in 1971, in response to a petition filed by the National Organization of Women.

The advocacy group American Women in Radio and Television is fighting the roll-back. "Women are still severely underrepresented," says Terri Dickerson, the group's executive direc-

tor. "They are only 39 to 40 percent of the broadcast workforce." In addition, Dickerson says, "Only about 3 percent of TV stations and 2 percent of radio stations are owned by women. Women really don't have a

role in shaping what viewers see."

Partial truths

Nearly 10 months into the public debate over dilation and extraction (D&X) abortions, most major newspapers continue to refer to the procedure as "partial birth abortions," a term coined not by doctors but by the anti-choice movement.

This unthinking acceptance of anti-choice rhetoric as fact, which Media Watch reported on a few months ago, was very much in evidence in reports on President Clinton's veto of the congressional ban on D&X abortions. Among the papers that used the "partial birth" designation were *USA Today*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, the *Boston Herald* and the *New York Daily News*. The misnomer also turned up on the Associated Press, which ensured that it went out to hundreds of other papers as well.

TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



Dole and Congress prize the \$4.35 minimum wage; agree to live on it.

BIG GOONS ON CAMPUS

The current labor unrest at Yale is nothing new. Since 1968, unions at Yale have gone out on strike six different times, and emerged with strong contracts six different times. This year, though, Yale management has introduced an ominous twist: an outside security firm with a past record of violence against strikers.

Almost immediately after clerical and technical workers walked off the job on February 7, Yale brought in guards from Professional Law Enforcement, Inc. (PLE) to "ensure safety and order" both on the picket lines and inside the campus' physical plant, where maintenance and service employees were still working. Yale's clerical workers, represented by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 34, have been conducting a tag-team strike for the past 10 weeks with the university's maintenance and service workers, who are represented by HERE Local 35. In an attempt to build up the strike fund and keep Yale from hiring replacement

workers, one local has worked while the other has been on strike.

PLE, a private-security firm based in Dayton, Ohio, has handled recent strikes with a gusto worthy of the Pinkertons of bygone days. While keeping the peace at a strike against the Pirelli-Armstrong Tire Co. in Nashville, Tenn., in late 1994, a PLE guard smashed a Mag-Lite flashlight into a striker's head after an argument developed. At a strike against the same company in Hanford, Calif., less than two months later, videotapes captured PLE guards beating picketers with flashlights. That incident ended with police hauling away both strikers and PLE employees.

Nonetheless, Yale's deputy director of public affairs, Tom Conroy, maintains that PLE is "a reputable firm." According to Conroy, hiring PLE was necessary to stop unspecified "incidents of sabotage" on campus and to "augment the general efforts of the Yale police to ensure safety and order."

That's one way to describe a massive surveillance campaign that borders on harassment. PLE guards have flooded the Yale workplace, videotaping workers as they go about their

jobs, taking still photographs, and, on occasion, following them through the streets of New Haven. When Local 35 workers responded by bringing cameras to work to videotape the PLE guards, they were suspended.

Hiring such talent has been an expensive proposition for the university. Yale will spend at least \$1.6 million for PLE's services by graduation day, according to Deborah Chernoff, spokesperson for the Federation of University Employees. "That is more than Yale will save by its dining hall proposal, which involves cutting wages for dining-hall workers over four years," she says.

But the real conflict is less about costs than about control. Yale is demanding, for the first time, an unlimited right to subcontract all future maintenance and service work. In return, the university has offered to guarantee every current Local 35 member's job and wages until the end of the current contract if the union concedes on the issue.

This is, of course, a formula for eventually abolishing union labor at Yale, as management shifts more and more jobs to non-union private firms. In that sense, the security forces of PLE might be seen as more than mere hired goons: As poorly paid, subcontracted labor themselves, they are a harbinger of the nasty Yale workplace of the future if the locals lose.

—James Surowiecki



Can-do spirit

THOSE WHO THINK VOLUNTARY RECYCLING works should consider this: In the United States, aluminum cans are being recycled at a rate of 62.2 percent, the lowest in the past six years. According to the Container Recycling Institute in Washington, Americans threw away 38 billion aluminum cans in 1995. Pat Franklin, the institute's director, observes: "The tens of billions of aluminum cans we discard each year represent much more than the tons they weigh, cubic yards of landfill space they occupy or the miles of countryside they litter. These containers, that so exemplify our throwaway mentality, represent a wealth of energy and resources squandered." She points out that in the nine states that have beverage container deposit laws on their books, the recovery rate for aluminum cans is 85 percent. —J.B.

SQUAT PLOT

As the Broadway musical "Rent" garners critical raves, squatters in Manhattan's Lower East Side aren't finding much glamour in resisting their negligent landlord—the City of New York. Last May, the city attempted to evict squatters inhabiting a block of formerly dilapidated buildings on East 13th Street. Police used tear gas, helicopters, even a converted tank in their efforts to dislodge the inhabitants.

So charged is the atmosphere around 13th Street that squatters assailed members of Community

with smoke bombs and cat feces, during board meetings. Indeed, the board's rules of order have been revised to prohibit "setting off firecrackers, blowing whistles, using a bullhorn, etc."

Despite the tense state of the confrontation, the squatters may be gaining an upper hand in the courts. A State Supreme Court ruling last November—up for appeal on May 9—granted a preliminary injunction barring the city from legally evicting residents of the buildings. If finally decided in the squatters' favor, the case could redefine the city's relationship to the thousands of abandoned properties it owns.

The city wants to transfer the properties to a group of corporate investors called the New York Equity Fund, ostensibly to develop low-income family housing. But Jacqueline Bukowski, a lawyer for the squatters, says this just rationalizes an effort to shift the responsibility for low-income housing to private-sector profiteers. In the short term, Fund members will receive federal tax credits and direct state and local assistance for rehabbing the buildings—and after 15 years, they can convert the properties to market-rate rentals.

The 13th Street squats were only a few of hundreds of buildings in Alphabet City—the area east of Tompkins Square Park—that the city foreclosed on and seized during the late 1970s. Municipal bureaucrats converted some of the buildings into affordable housing, auctioned some to developers and permitted most to decay into drug dens or makeshift dwellings for New York's vast homeless population.

The East 13th Street Homesteaders' Coalition has challenged the city under the obscure doctrine of "adverse possession," arguing that the city is a delinquent landlord of its property.

Prior to the coalition's case, no one had used the doctrine against the city. "Usually adversity doesn't run against the government," explains Bukowski. "But the city held these buildings in a proprietary capacity, as a landlord." And since the city never used the disputed properties for the public good, Bukowski argues that the squats ought

to be eligible for adverse possession.

In his November ruling, state Supreme Court Justice Elliot Wilk found "ample evidence" to support the petitioners' claim. The squatters can argue adverse possession because they have lived in the buildings for 10 continuous years without formal complaint from the city. Squatters have inhabited the units since 1984, when the Homesteaders Coalition rehabilitated the decrepit buildings without formal objection from the city. According to Wilks, if the residents are evicted, they will face "irreparable injury," i.e., homelessness, and will be eligible for an injunction against the city—and possibly title to the buildings themselves.

Multiply that irreparable injury by 50,000—the number of people homeless each night in New York—then divide by the number of abandoned buildings in the Big Apple, and you have a mayor with a major headache. "This is ideology run amok," com-

plained Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. "The judge made up the law. The decision will not stand."

Giuliani has good reason to be nervous. A case establishing that squatters can pry free property from city realty lists must not sit well with the prince of privatization. Nor could he be pleased that New York is hosting a possibly precedent-setting challenge to government ownership of unused housing.

As the squatters' day in court approaches, a kind of wary conviviality prevails in Alphabet City. At a recent festival, 50 squatters and community residents gathered for an evening of food, music and poetry, all under the watchful eye of the mobile police substation parked across the street. If the court finds in the squatters' favor next month, East 13th Street will be home to the next spirited off-Broadway production about landlord relations. —Theo Emery and Scott Handleman

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



THE FIRST STONE

TIN STARR PROSECUTOR

By Joel Bleifuss

Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel charged with investigating the "Clinton scandals" of Whitewater, Travelgate and the death of Deputy White House Counsel Vincent Foster, is now being enveloped by a host of scandals of his own. These scandals raise a fundamental question about Starr's integrity: Do Starr's various conflicts of interest, questionable business dealings and partisan political ties render him unfit for the special prosecutor's job?

What follows is a citizen's and, we hope, a reporter's guide to tracking what are becoming known as the Starr scandals.

- **Starr's shady real estate deal.** Starr, as he investigates the Clintons' Whitewater land dealings, has refused to account for a mysterious little land deal of his own—a deal that looks like it could be connected to a key figure in the Iran-contra affair.

Robert Parry, in the March 28 issue of *The Consortium*, reports that in 1982, Starr invested \$20,000 in an ill-fated Texas real estate partnership known as Lubbock AK Ltd. (Recall that in the early '80s numerous Texas real estate deals turned large profits, thanks to inflated land values fueled by the illegal lending practices of many S&Ls.) At the time, Starr was working as the counselor to then-Attorney General William French Smith. Not much is known about Lubbock AK. Starr has refused to answer questions about his business deal. However, the special prosecutor's personal lawyer, Terry Adamson, told Parry, "Someone wanted to start a business and asked the Starrs for a \$20,000 investment, but it never started. ... Like some business ventures, it does not get to the point of documents. It was a loss." Who that "someone" is Adamson refuses to say.

Starr's financial disclosure forms, from when he served in the Reagan and Bush administrations in the '80s and '90s, list

his holdings in Lubbock AK. But those forms provide neither a company address nor the names of Starr's partners.

And while Adamson claims that Starr lost \$20,000 on the deal, Starr never claimed the loss on his tax returns. This raises two possibilities: Either Starr lost his entire investment and forgot to claim the tax deduction (which raises questions about his competence), or Starr made money off this investment and never declared it as income, which means he has violated federal tax law.

Starr's lawyer told Parry that his client will not divulge the names of his business partners out of respect for "the privacy of the individuals." But could Starr be protecting more than their privacy? What, for example, does the "AK" in the company name "Lubbock AK" stand for? Some circumstantial evidence suggests that AK could be the initials of

Iran-contra arms dealer and Saudi billionaire Adnan Khashoggi. Ronald Kessler, in *The Richest Man in the World*, a Khashoggi biography, writes that the arms dealer financed his \$120 million-a-year lifestyle out of a tax-dodging venture in the Cayman Islands known as AK Holdings Ltd. What's more, former *Houston Post* reporter Pete Brewton writes in *The Mafia, CIA & George Bush* that in the early '80s Khashoggi was involved in Texas real estate development.

Khashoggi, who is known as A.K. by his employees, also owned 22 acres of land near Houston through his company, AK Houston Properties. During the time Khashoggi owned the land he received numerous loans involving the development of the property. These included an August 1985 loan that garnered Khashoggi at least \$5 million in cash, just one week before Khashoggi paid the first \$1 million of \$5 million to Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian arms dealer, to initiate the secret U.S.-Israeli arms deals with Iran. According to Brewton, Khashoggi received that loan from Mainland Savings of Houston, which later collapsed. In all, financial transactions involving AK Houston ended up costing taxpayers about \$56 million.

Even without Starr disclosing the names of his Lubbock AK business partners, one would expect that Texas public records would reveal any connection between AK Houston and Lubbock AK. Texas law requires that information about the Lubbock AK real estate partnership, such as the business address, names of the partners and the amount each invested, be registered with the Texas secretary of state. But no information about Lubbock AK exists in the public records. Again, two explanations present themselves, neither especially kind to Starr: Either Texas law was broken and no records were filed, or the records were duly filed in 1982 but have since disappeared—through extraordinary bureau-

cratic incompetence or through a politically motivated cover-up. But until more information surfaces about Lubbock AK, any link between the special prosecutor and the Iran-contra arms dealer must remain speculative.

◦ **Starr's serious conflict of interest.** In September 1994, Starr began to probe how officials at the Resolution Trust Corp. (RTC) were handling the collapse of Madison Guaranty, the S&L at the center of the Whitewater scandal. Curiously enough, at the same time Starr was investigating RTC officials, his law firm, Kirkland & Ellis, of which he remains a senior partner, was negotiating a secret settlement over a professional negligence lawsuit RTC officials had brought against the firm.

Joe Conason and Murray Waas, who broke this story in *The Nation*, report that the RTC, in its suit against Kirkland & Ellis, had charged Starr's firm with "aiding and abetting breaches of fiduciary responsibility" at the Colorado-based First America Savings Bank. According to the RTC, Kirkland & Ellis had helped "implement a scheme to transfer funds"—about \$1 million—to the thrift's owners, at a time when the S&L was in financial trouble and under the scrutiny of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, the precursor to the RTC. But the suit never made it to trial. In September 1994, a federal judge ordered the RTC and Kirkland & Ellis to seek an out-of-court settlement.

Yet at the time RTC officials were negotiating with Kirkland & Ellis, those same officials were being investigated by Starr. One of Starr's first actions as special prosecutor was to charge the Whitewater grand jury to examine the RTC's decision to suspend L. Jean Lewis, an RTC senior investigator who had first begun the probe into the Clintons' involvement with Madison Guaranty. Lewis had been placed on a two-week administrative leave for secretly recording conversations with another RTC official, and then providing the tape of that conversation to Republicans in Congress. In her spare time, Lewis, a Republican Party activist, markets Hillary Clinton T-shirts that bear the acronymic message: "BITCH—Boys, I'm Taking Charge Here."

Starr initiated the RTC inquiry into Lewis' suspension one week before the court-ordered settlement conference was scheduled to begin. As Conason and Waas observe, "In effect, Starr had put himself in a position to exercise the leverage of possible criminal sanctions against a group of federal officials who would decide whether and how the RTC's case against his Kirkland & Ellis partnership should be settled."

Conason and Waas report that this "secret agreement" saved Starr's law firm an estimated \$700,000. But in addition to saving the firm money, the settlement also appears to have saved Starr from having to answer for this blatant conflict of interest. Starr's law firm insisted that the agreement be kept secret. The settlement's final clause reads, in part, that the RTC "shall take no action, directly or indirectly, to initiate disclosure or public comment concerning this settlement ... [and] that RTC [would] exercise its best

efforts to preserve the confidentiality of the information ... by cooperating with [Kirkland & Ellis] to obtain an appropriate protective order or other reliable assurance that confidential treatment will be accorded the information."

But it wasn't entirely secret. Conason and Waas report that Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-NY) and Rep. Jim Leach (R-IA), the respective chairs of the Senate and House Whitewater committees, have known of Starr's conflict of interest since at least last July, but said nothing.

◦ **Starr's ties to the far right.** Earlier this month, Starr, who continues his work as a private lawyer, lost a school voucher case that he argued before the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Starr took the case at the behest of voucher advocate Gov. Tommy Thompson. And his legal fees were paid by a \$150,000 grant from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation of Milwaukee. During the summer of 1985, the foundation had paid Starr for legal advice on the voucher issue.

Besides funding Starr directly, the Bradley Foundation also supports a host of right-wing groups that are doing their best to use Whitewater and other scandals to turn Clinton out of office. For instance, Bradley funds the Landmark Legal Foundation, a right-wing group that has provided legal aid to suspended RTC official Lewis. And the foundation helps finance the Hudson Institute, which hired a former Bush administration official to study the Clintons' ethics. Bradley also is a longtime supporter of *The American Spectator*, the right-wing magazine that is promoting the lurid claims of Paula Corbin, a former state employee who charges that then-Gov. Bill Clinton exposed himself as he propositioned her. (Prior to accepting the job as special prosecutor, Starr offered to do pro bono legal work for Corbin.)

◦ **Starr stories not fit for print.** Few in the general public know about this growing litany of irregularities in Starr's business, legal and political dealings, for the simple reason that they have received no serious attention in the mainstream press. There are signs that this might be changing, however. As *In These Times* went to press, *The New Yorker* was slated to come out with a major piece on Starr's background, and Frank Rich, in the op-ed section of the *New York Times*, has devoted two columns on the subject—including one that mentions a forthcoming *Mother Jones* investigation into Starr's links with the tobacco industry.

Nevertheless, the papers of record apparently still do not consider any of this "news." The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* plod on with their obsequious coverage of the Republican witch-hunts on Whitewater and Travelgate and Foster. Neither has picked up on Parry's report about Starr's mysterious real estate dealings in Texas. Conason and Waas' *Nation* investigation did get a 40-word mention in the news section of the *Post*. But the news pages of the *New York Times* have been conspicuously silent. It seems that some reporters have drunk too deeply of the Whitewater cauldron being stirred by a coven of right-wing organizations.

ENVIRONMENT

How green was my rhetoric

L

ike a chameleon responding to a change in its habitat, President Bill Clinton has reacted to the public's alarm over the Republicans' environmental backlash by taking on a greener hue, declaring protection of the environment one of the key themes of his re-election campaign. At the same time, environmental groups ranging from the mainstream moderates at the National Wildlife Federation to tree-sitting forest activists in rural Oregon have begun using terms like "sell-out," "undermine" and "betray" to describe deals the administration is quietly pursuing with anti-environmental forces on the Hill.

Even though he's delivered some promising appointments, Bill Clinton has established a fairly dismal record in his first term as steward of the Earth. Indeed, the anti-environ-

mental backlash that emerged in the 103rd Congress and flowered in the 104th drew much of its initial momentum from a key concession the president made in the earliest days of his administration. In March 1993, Clinton gave up on a plan to generate a billion dollars a year in new revenues after Western politicians, led by Democratic Sen. Max Baucus of Montana, objected to a proposed increase in fees for the holy trinity of interests that feeds on public land—the logging, mining and cattle-grazing industries.

"We drove the stake on that one," says an aide to Baucus. "We were in negotiations with the White House, and we were prepared to compromise, but 12 hours after delivering our demands he just capitulated."

"That was the first string that unraveled the ball. When they saw him cave in on mining and grazing, they knew it was open season," says Jeff Patrich, Democratic counsel to the House Resources Committee.

Of course, Clinton had been willing to invest his political capital and make major trade-offs to advance programs around free

trade, deficit reduction and health care. But he failed to take similar risks for the environment during his first years in office.

Instead, the administration hammered together a series of mediagenic but low-cost eco-agreements. On the eve of Earth Day 1993, Clinton announced his intention to sign an international treaty on global warming that George Bush had initially refused to support when he attended the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. During a speech in the U.S. Botanical Gardens, Clinton committed the United States "to reducing our emissions of greenhouse gases to their 1990 levels by the year 2000." Most observers greeted Clinton's announcement as a victory for the green agenda of Vice President Al Gore over then-Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen and Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary, both big fans of fossil fuel.

Yet the administration was quick to abandon whatever substance might have lurked behind Clinton's posturing. The administration's original plan to cut carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases included a deficit-reducing energy tax and increased gasoline taxes of up to 20 cents a gallon. But a computer-driven "grass-roots" letter and phone-in campaign orchestrated by the National Association of Manufacturers, along with an oil-funded push by PR giant Burson-Marsteller, helped undermine the energy tax idea. And the first sign of industry opposition to the tax in the Senate sent the administration packing. (The tax had already survived a similar showdown in the House.) Relations between the White House and congressional Democrats soured quickly after that. Congress then voted to keep the gasoline tax below five cents a gallon, guaranteeing that America would have the lowest fuel prices in the developed

Clinton seeks to dress up a track record of eco-duplicity in order to get re-elected.

By David Helvarg

world—and that alternative energy sources would remain noncompetitive.

Not long after the greenhouse gas tax debacle, there was some talk about imposing for new fuel-efficiency standards for automobiles. But instead, President Clinton held a Rose Garden ceremony with the CEOs of Ford, GM and Chrysler to announce a government-industry program to create an 80-miles-per-gallon “green car” sometime in the future. Clinton promised that the program would usher in “a new car-crazy chapter” in American history.

A pattern was beginning to emerge: Stage a high-profile public announcement (preferably in a garden), then once the cameras clear out and political hardball begins, backpedal like crazy. This course of action came into high relief in October 1993, when the administration announced its final “Climate Change Action Plan” to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The “action plan” turned out to be a voluntary effort, based on some redirected federal dollars and the good will of industry. An economist with the Environmental Defense Fund, a moderate group that generally favors “market-based” solutions to pollution, compared the regulation-free Clinton plan to tightrope walking without a safety net.

In September 1995, the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which includes 2,500 of the world’s leading climate scientists, issued a startling report that concluded that the Earth is entering or may already have entered a Greenhouse era. Continued emissions of greenhouse gases, the report states, could lead to regional droughts, super-hurricanes, the spread of diseases and rising sea levels that could inundate island nations and heavily populated coastal plains.

A few months later the administration was forced to admit it had fallen off the tightrope: The United States wasn’t going to meet its goal of stabilizing output at 1990 levels by 2000. Britain and other signatories to the climate treaty have warned that the U.S. failure will be seen as a green light by China, India and other developing nations who want to exploit their coal and other fossil fuel reserves.

Still, the public perception has been that Bill Clinton must be doing right by the Earth—after all, isn’t Al Gore the greenest fellow since Kermit the Frog? For several years national environmental groups failed to suggest otherwise. Increasingly centralized and committed to lobbying Washington, they wrongly perceived themselves as serious players in the Beltway power game. “We put a lot of our money into educating policy-makers,” says a staffer for one of the foundations that funded the environmental groups’



D.C. outreach effort.

In retrospect, it's clear that the Beltway approach contained a fatal flaw: Policy-makers (i.e., politicians) tend to be hard-wired to more immediate rewards than eco-enlightenment. As the late '60s firebrand Saul Alinsky used to say, power in America responds to two poles, money and people. And in Washington, where money is the name of the game, the industrial lobbies have established a rough but consistent math—for every green PAC dollar that comes to town, they see it and raise it 10.

Now, with the 104th Congress threatening to weaken the environmental laws and regulations that protect the quality of America's air, water, parks, workplaces and wildlife, the American public has been roused to assert its commitment to environmental quality. Even Republican pollsters are detecting a hard core of long-held eco-friendly beliefs among American voters. A Frank Luntz poll conducted for Newt Gingrich found the public prefers “more environmental protection” over “cutting regulations” by 2-to-1, while Republican pollster Linda DiVall recently

revealed that 55 percent of Republicans don't trust their own party to defend the environment.

The Clinton administration, never faulted for its ability to spot a polling trend, has begun flying the green banner it stuck in the back of its closet in 1993. "I think the American people came to take for granted that environmental progress would continue. But with this new congressional assault those assumptions have changed," says Clinton campaign strategist Dick Morris. "I think the environment will loom very large and be high on the '96 campaign agenda."

Lest anyone mistake Morris for a Greenpeace, among the previous candidates he's championed is Mississippi Republican Sen. Trent Lott. Lott recently introduced legislation to muzzle TRI, the Toxic Release Inventory. TRI requires industries to inform the public of the quantities of 650 toxic chemicals they release into communities.

Under Morris' counsel, Clinton's speeches have begun to include regular references to Republican threats to "Medicare, education and the environment." Clinton has vetoed a budget rider that would open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, as well as bills that would drastically cut funding to the EPA and Interior Department. Al Gore has gone on the road to talk up the importance of environmental protection (most recently in the Florida Everglades), as has EPA Administrator Carol Browner and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

In his January 1996 State of the Union address, the president emphasized environmental protection to a far greater degree than he has in the past. In one of the most confrontational sections of his speech, he said: "Congress has voted to cut environmental enforcement by 25 percent. That means more toxic chemicals in our water, more smog in our air, more pesticides in our food. Lobbyists for polluters have been allowed to write their own loopholes into bills to weaken laws that protect the health and safety of our children. ... I challenge Congress to re-examine those policies and reverse them."

But it remains unclear to what degree the administration is ready to link its campaign rhetoric to its own policies. The Republicans have managed to pass only one major element of their backlash agenda into law: the "Salvage Logging" rider to the rescissions bill. President Clinton first vetoed this (after the White House received some 50,000 messages of protest) and then signed it into law last July (after administration officials negotiated minor changes in the language with House Republicans behind the backs of still-angry House Democrats). While Interior Secretary Babbitt argued against allowing salvage logging, Chief of Staff Leon Panetta thought it might be worth some Western votes, a political miscalculation that his boss has since come to regret.

The rider, which in the name of "forest health" and fire prevention overrides all other laws (the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Forest Management Act, etc.), requires that 4 billion feet of public timber be sold off by 1997.

The credibility gap Clinton opened up in the salvage log-

ging battle widened into a full-fledged chasm just two days after his State of the Union attack on the GOP's environmental rollback. That's when Mary Nichols, a high-ranking official at the EPA, testified in front of the House Commerce Committee in favor of continued production of a dangerous pesticide.

Methyl bromide, which the EPA lists as an acute toxin and Class 1 Ozone Depleter, is, under the Clean Air Act, scheduled for elimination by 2001. But it remains in widespread use, particularly among strawberry and tomato farmers in California and Florida. "Clearly, California and Florida are two key states for the '96 campaign, and the chemical-ag vote is important to this administration," says Kalee Kreider, a spokesperson for the environmental group Ozone Action. "From our point of view, Clinton seems willing to trade lives for votes." At the least, he's willing to trade the environment for the support of politically powerful special interests. Campaign watchers also expect Clinton to reverse himself on federal water policy, issuing new rules to continue providing cheap public water to California's largest farm corporations.

In budget negotiations now under way on the Department of Interior's '96 appropriations, the administration may also offer to extend a moratorium on new ESA listings that the Republicans imposed last year. The moratorium already prohibits the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service from protecting the Stellar sea lion, Florida black bear, various salmon runs and other threatened species. If the administration extends the ban, Republican attempts to gut the ESA, going nowhere in the House and Senate, may yet achieve a series of extinctions by default.

Erik Olson, a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, expresses a fear shared among many environmental advocates around Washington. "When you go to conference with a horrendous House bill and a really bad Senate bill, what do you get? Something between horrendous and really bad that Bill Clinton may be inclined to compromise on."

"This administration has got to stop believing that it can feed this monster. It's got to go out and slay this monster," warns California Rep. George Miller, the senior Democrat on the House Resources Committee. "This guy [Clinton] has got to recognize that there are fundamental and basic principles that a large majority of Americans agree with, and his job is to show how those principles and those beliefs are not consistent with this radical Republican agenda on the environment."

Stung by angry, widespread protests against the president's signing off on salvage logging last summer, the administration has now begun to reverse policy, saying that it "didn't realize the damage that would be done." In terms of political damage, it may well be that Clinton hasn't seen anything yet.

David Helvarg is a television producer and author of *The War Against the Greens* (Sierra Club Books), which will appear in paperback early next year.



A D I A T I O N

Daughter of time

T

*Alice Stewart's
research on
low-level
radiation made
her a pariah
for 30 years—
mainly because
Stewart was
right.*

By Gayle Greene

here are few areas of scientific inquiry where truth has been so slow in coming out as nuclear research. Because enormous sums of money ride on it, and it has been closely tied to national prestige and security, its secrets—and its dangers—have been jealously guarded. For years, officials have assured the public that a little radiation does no harm. Extensive research, they claim, has produced no proof of a cancer effect at levels likely to be encountered in nuclear facilities, diagnostic X-rays or radioactive waste released slowly into the environment. According to international regulatory guidelines and the multimillion-dollar studies of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors on which they are based, cancer risk diminishes as dose does.

Actually, scientists have been finding evidence for decades that low-dose radi-

ation can cause cancer. But despite their efforts to make their findings known, these scientists have found themselves silenced and their work suppressed. Dr. Alice Stewart, an 89-year-old British radiation epidemiologist at Birmingham University, is one of the most persistent and scientifically respected critics of the official story. She and her statistician, George Kneale, have been doing cancer epidemiology for 20 years and have concluded that radiation may be *more* dangerous in lower doses because, rather than killing cells outright, it allows them to repair themselves partially in a way that can cause genetic damage and birth defects.

Unfortunately, Stewart's hypotheses have fallen on deaf ears in official circles. "Nobody wants to hear what we have to say," Stewart says. "If we are correct, occupational safety standards will have to be redrawn, and it could open the floodgates to compensation claims from workers, veterans and downwinders. If we are correct, then radioactive waste is a bigger problem than anyone thought—you can't just dump it in the ocean

or anywhere else and hope that as long as it comes off slowly to imitate background radiation there's no effect. Because if you increase the world level of background radiation, mutations and cancer deaths will increase astronomically."

Forty years ago Stewart discovered that a single exposure to a diagnostic X-ray shortly before birth can significantly increase the chance of an early cancer death. Beginning from a hunch that factors in prenatal existence may account for the rise in childhood leukemia, she obtained records of children who had died of any form of cancer between 1953 and 1955 and devised a questionnaire for the mothers. After examining the first 35 questionnaires returned, Stewart noted a stunningly clear pattern: Those children who had prenatal X-rays were twice as likely as others to develop cancer.

Stewart's findings, published in 1956 and expanded in 1958, received a cold reception from the medical establishment. Radiologists and obstetricians were enjoying lucrative practices and didn't like to be told they might be killing their patients. Radiography was a new toy, and doctors were using it for everything from examining fetuses to treating acne and menstrual cramps. In the United States, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was promoting the "Atoms for Peace" program and building a large and powerful nuclear industry that depended on the public's trust in the friendly atom.

In the mid-'50s, Stewart and Kneale set up the Oxford Survey of Childhood Cancer, where, over the next two decades, they continued to monitor fetal X-rays and cancer effects. Working for a pittance, on funding scrounged together from America, they managed to keep the survey going until the late '70s, when the practice of fetal X-rays gradually ceased.

Stewart and Kneale were asking questions that put them on the cutting edge of research into cancer and the immune system. They had demonstrated that children incubating cancer have greatly increased susceptibility to infections. They were beginning to test connections between inoculations and resistance to cancer. Later, after Chernobyl, they used the Oxford Survey to demonstrate an association of background radiation with incidences of childhood cancer.

"It's exactly this sort of monitoring of the population that you need if you're going to get to the cause of cancer," Stewart maintains. But there was not sufficient interest in the project to keep it going. With funding drying up, Stewart was made unwelcome at Oxford and left in 1974. A few years later, she closed the survey.

As Stewart was relocating to Birmingham in 1974, she got a phone call from America. Dr. Thomas Mancuso, who had been appointed by the AEC to conduct what appeared to be routine health studies of U.S. nuclear workers, wanted her to "take a closer look" at some findings about nuclear workers at the vast weapons complex in Hanford, Wash., which had been built in 1943 to produce plutonium for the Manhattan Project. Commission officials had not expected Mancuso's study to turn up anything troubling. Following the lead of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) studies of the atomic bomb survivors and its successor, the Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF), the AEC maintained that low-level radiation presented little danger—a view that conveniently supported the AEC's plans to expand the nuclear industry and weapons production.

In 1974, Stewart was 68 and officially retired. She had barely heard of Hanford, but she and Kneale made the long trek there to look at Mancuso's data. Their investigations revealed that the Hanford plant was exposing workers to much more danger than the AEC let on: Radiation exposure standards were set too low, Stewart estimated, by a factor of 20. "That put the cat among the pigeons," Stewart recalls. The AEC dismissed Mancuso and attempted to seize his data, and Stewart and Kneale returned to England, taking with them a copy of the data so that they could continue their analysis.

Mancuso, Stewart and Kneale published their findings in 1977, and their report had momentous implications: It put the researchers on a collision course not only with the RERF but with numerous international regulatory committees. The International Commission on Radiation Protection—the organization charged with setting worldwide guidelines for radiation exposure levels—as well as the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and Britain's National Radiation Protection Board, take RERF recommendations. So, too, does the prestigious U.S.

National Academy of Sciences committee on the Biological Effects of Ionizing Radiation (BEIR), whose 1990 report, BEIR V, is the gold standard of radiation health risk. These guidelines are the basis not only for worker safety standards but for ascertaining risks versus benefits of nuclear energy and deciding legal liability and compensation claims.

Stewart, who had been a practicing physician for years, was astonished to find that the ABCC—and, later, RERF—studies were accepted so uncritically. The studies, begun five years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki's nuclear blasts, assumed that the survivors were a representative population. This population was made up of the heartiest survivors, but they were bound to have residual effects from the blast. The survivor group was not representative, nor was it a reliable measure of risk to workers who had never been exposed to high-dose radiation but were exposed to low doses year after year. This was no population, in other words, on which to base safety standards.

The AEC—which was being reconfigured as the Energy Research and Development Administration and the Department of Energy (DOE) as the Mancuso affair unfolded—did not manage to take back the workers' records that Stewart, Kneale and Mancuso had in their possession. But it denied them further access to workers'

records. From then on, the DOE kept research on nuclear worker safety under strict supervision. The labs the department contracted carried on research as though the Mancuso-Stewart-Kneale study had never happened and, not surprisingly, turned up no evidence of low-dose radiation danger.

So began one of the most scandalous chapters in the story of Cold War science, a story of censorship, subterfuge and suppression. But so, too, began a long and determined struggle on the part of anti-nuclear groups and independent scientists to break the stranglehold of the Department of Energy. By January 1978 the Mancuso affair had provoked hearings by the House Commerce Subcommittee on Health and Environment. Congressional investigators concluded that the DOE had "attempted a cover-up" and that the firing of Mancuso was "insupportable." Stewart testified that it was indefensible for the DOE to lock up the medical records of its 600,000 weapons workers. These records, she argued, were the best source of information on the effects of low-level radiation, and the DOE's management of health studies was hindering freedom of scientific inquiry.

Nonetheless, the DOE held firm, denying numerous Freedom of Information Act requests on the grounds of protecting national security. The demise of the Soviet Union made this excuse untenable and, after years of stalling, the DOE agreed in 1992 to release the workers' records. It was an unprecedented victory: The Three Mile Island Public Health



Fund awarded Stewart, then 86, a \$1.4 million grant to study the newly released Hanford data, along with worker records from DOE facilities at Oak Ridge, Tenn., Los Alamos, N.M. and Savannah River, S.C. She and George Kneale have been at work on the data ever since.

What Alice Stewart has to tell the world about the hazards of low-level radiation is, if anything, more urgent since she alerted the world to the links between fetal X-rays and childhood cancer four decades ago. The nuclear age is not over. The environmental contamination created by weapons testing and the nuclear industry, revealed after decades of official denial, has become an international nightmare. Both the United States and the former Soviet Union now face the challenge of dismantling their nuclear arsenals and coping with the garbage. The cost of the cleanup is estimated to exceed the cost of the building—assuming that anyone can figure out how to clean it up.

The public continues to be uninformed and misinformed. A front-page *New York Times* article (March 31, 1996) reports that fear is the direst danger to inhabitants in the vicinity of Chernobyl, that “the deepest scars are of the mind” and that “fewer than 500 people have died so far as a direct result” of the accident. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government estimates that because of Chernobyl, 8,000 of its citizens have died of radiation-related illness, with disease rates, miscarriages and birth defects steadily rising. Less than a decade after the Chernobyl accident, an estimated 150,000 children in nearby areas suffer from thyroid cancer and leukemia.

The Alice Stewart story is a cautionary tale about what happens to a scientist who takes an unpopular position. “They don’t burn you at the stake, they just deprive you of funding and means to carry on.” But it’s also an inspiring story. She remains confident that “truth is the daughter of time—it’s a very ancient saying, but very true. In the end, the story will come out.”

Stewart is one of a handful of independent scientists—including John Gofman, Rosalie Bertell, Irwin Bross and Ernest Sternglass—thanks to whom the truth is coming out, and we have not had to take the word of the DOE about the health effects of radiation. Thanks to them, the anti-nuclear movement has been able to build a scientific case against the claims of the nuclear industry and has had enormous effect in curbing the industry’s expansion.

Stewart will be 90 in October. As the effects of the world’s worst nuclear disaster, at Chernobyl, are visited upon hundreds of thousands of children, this world-class authority on cancer and radiation finds herself once more without funding. The Three Mile Island fund will exhaust this summer, but she will not. She is still at the forefront of radiation research, still tracking mysteries: “There are many Stewart hypotheses that have not been tested,” she says. But the world seems still not to want to know about the cancer-radiation link.

Gayle Greene is at work on a biography of Alice Stewart and co-authoring a book on cancer and the environment.

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IT15

E N V I R O N M E N T

Put a toxin in your tank

In January, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner signed the final rules concluding the 25-year phaseout of leaded gasoline. "The elimination of lead from gas is one of the great environmental achievements of all time," she said. "Thousands of tons of lead have been removed from the air, and blood levels of lead in our children are down 70 percent. This means that millions of children will be spared the painful consequences of lead poisoning, such as permanent nerve damage, anemia or mental retardation."

Gasoline makers may have got the lead out, but manganese remains a potential threat to health.

By Will Nixon

But the specter of heavy-metal toxicity once again looms in the form of another gasoline additive: methylcyclopentadienyl manganese tricarbonyl, also known as MMT. The Ethyl Corp., the company that makes MMT, also developed and manufactured tetraethyl lead (TEL), the

gasoline additive of choice from the '20s until the late '70s. The Richmond, Va.-based company survived the decline of TEL by developing other lubricants and additives for cars, railroads, home furnaces and industrial equipment. It now employs 1,500 people and generates about \$1 billion a year in sales.

Like TEL, MMT boosts octane, allowing cars to burn fuel more efficiently and avoid "engine knock." Also like lead, manganese, MMT's active ingredient, can be toxic in high doses. Since 1843, doctors have recorded hundreds of cases of manganism, a disorder resulting from high-level manganese exposure, in miners and factory workers. At first, their hands shake. Then, as the metal kills brain cells that control movements, their faces may grow rigid as a mask, their ankles may stiffen until they "cock walk" on the balls of their feet, and their whole body might even periodically freeze.

"It combines the worst aspects of dementia and Parkinson's disease," says Ellen Silbergeld, a toxicologist at the University of

Maryland who works with the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). Yet, at the low levels found in MMT, no one knows what effect, if any, manganese may have on people's health. Unfortunately, the public may get to be the guinea pigs.

Ironically, after a 17-year ban, MMT has only recently become legal again in the United States. In 1977, Congress restricted MMT from unleaded fuel—although not because regulators feared the additive's threat to public health. Rather, auto manufacturers found that manganese, like lead, damaged the catalytic converters and other equipment they were installing in new cars to meet tougher emissions standards. As they began introducing cars that ran on unleaded fuel, carmakers lobbied Congress to ban MMT additives in lead-free gas.

In fact, automobile manufacturers have been MMT's strongest opponents. They claim that the record of ordinary cars on the road shows that manganese oxides coat engine parts. They report that spark plugs and oxygen sensors must be changed much more often in Canada, where MMT has never been banned, than in the northern United States.

Nonetheless, since 1978 Ethyl has applied to the EPA four times to waive the ban, spending \$30 million on road tests and legal fees to prove that MMT doesn't interfere with the emissions controls. After flunking the first road tests, Ethyl's test fleet eventually passed the EPA's standards in the early '90s. Still, in July 1994, the agency again rejected the company's application, now arguing that MMT hadn't been tested as a possible risk to public health.

But last year, Ethyl won two cases against the EPA in the U.S. Court of Appeals, clearing the way for the return of MMT for unleaded gasoline. The court ruled that the

agency couldn't invoke health issues under a statute governing emissions-control systems. In December, Ethyl began selling MMT under the name HiTECH 3000.

"Nobody denies that manganese is toxic at high doses," says Jack Graham, a spokesman for Ethyl. But the level of manganese in MMT, he maintains, "1/32 of a gram per gallon, one drop from an eyedropper, is orders of magnitude different from the exposures to miners or workers in smelters." If the EPA could prove that MMT threatened public health, it could prevent Ethyl from selling it under a different statute. "The point is, they don't have any evidence," Graham says. Ethyl may sell MMT in the two-thirds of the country that isn't mandated by law to use cleaner-burning "reformulated" gasoline.

Graham is half right. The agency can't produce any good evidence of MMT's health threat because no one has conducted the tests that would answer many of the questions about the risks posed by low levels of manganese found in the additive. In 1991, the EPA sponsored a symposium of health experts that drew up an agenda for testing manganese, but as yet no one has taken up the challenge. If Ethyl had begun conducting these tests five years ago, rather than taking the EPA to court, Silbergeld says, many of them would have been completed by now.

Toxicologists have good reason to worry about manganese. In the past decade, researchers have found that workers who inhale much lower levels of manganese dust show early signs of problems, such as hand tremors. They're still breathing levels hundreds of times higher than someone would find in car exhaust, but they're also healthy men in the prime of life. Many pollutants cause acute symptoms only in susceptible groups such as children, asthmatics or people with compromised immune systems. Some researchers suspect that manganese might accelerate the decay of brain cells in the elderly. And since all the known victims of workplace exposure to manganese have been men, researchers don't know what impact the metal might have on women, particularly during pregnancy, when manganese can reach the fetus.

Ethyl is pushing MMT for a very simple reason: It's cheap. The largest refiners may not need this cheap boost, especially if they're using more expensive oxygenates, such as methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE) or ethanol, to make the reformulated gasoline. But the smaller refiners will likely snap it up. "The ones that sell their products to no-name gas stations will use it because the economics are overwhelming," says Michael Sargent, an analyst at Salomon Brothers. Ethyl hopes to build up to annual sales of \$65 to \$80 million in the United States. "It has the potential to be one of the most profitable products in their portfolio, if they are ever able to market it," Sargent adds. "But they are losing the battle in the court of public opinion."

In January, the EDF launched a public campaign against MMT, backed by 36 environmental and health groups. They wrote to the major refiners, asking them not to use MMT and to label their gas pumps "MMT-Free." Fifteen

major companies, representing more than 70 percent of the gasoline production in the country, replied that they aren't currently using MMT. But all ignored the request to label their pumps. And few of them are really taking a bold stand. "The refineries are rich in octane right now," says Jack Graham, so they can afford to wait for the controversy to die down.

And some of them have invested heavily in competing products. ARCO replied to the EDF's letter, for instance, but it's also one of the largest manufacturers of MTBE, a more expensive additive. MMT, its cheapest competitor, could turn ARCO's investment into a bust. Only four of the 15 companies have agreed to notify the public if they begin using MMT. The EDF has now asked the EPA to release the names of refiners using the additive from the private company reports submitted to the agency, but the EPA may not decide on this request for a year.

For now, the only obstacle to MMT is its risky reputation. Over time, if the public controversy fades, it could quietly spread through the industry. Once established, it might be hard to dislodge. Even TEL remains a profitable product on the international market despite being banned in the wealthier industrial nations. Many developing countries with eye-watering smog still run on leaded gas. In 1994, lead additives accounted for 22 percent of Ethyl's sales and 56 percent of its profits. "If you don't mind a little public condemnation, you can make a lot of money," says Clarence Ditow of the Center for Auto Safety, a Naderite group in Washington, D.C.

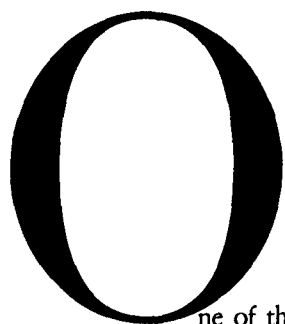
In 1925, Dr. Yandell Henderson, a Yale physiologist, wrote to a government official, "In the past, the position taken by the authorities has been that nothing could be prohibited until it was proved to have killed a number of people. I trust that in the future, especially in a matter of this sort, the position will be that a substance like tetraethyl lead can not be introduced for general use until it is proved harmless."

In 1996, alas, we hardly seem to have progressed. If MMT keeps passing the emissions tests, the EPA could only ban it again under a separate provision of the law that empowers the agency to regulate an additive that "may reasonably be anticipated to endanger the public health or welfare." The EPA can now require Ethyl to conduct health tests that should answer many of the questions about MMT, but these tests will take five to seven years to produce solid results. Meanwhile, the company will sell as much MMT as it can. The public, in effect, will join the lab rats as part of the experiment. Ellen Silbergeld believes that knowing nothing about the health risks of a new product should provide "a reasonable basis" for holding it off the market until the tests are done, but the legal interpretations of the Clean Air Act haven't agreed. "We must get beyond rewarding ignorance," she says. For now, we just seem to be rewarding Ethyl. ◀

Will Nixon is a freelance writer based in New York City. He writes frequently on environmental issues.

C H E R N O B Y L

Irradiated nation



*One of the
unrecognized
victims of
Chernobyl was
the Soviet state.*

By Jay M. Gould

One of the great mysteries of our time is why the Soviet Union unraveled so rapidly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. From the left and right alike, a host of observers have cited a host of familiar causes: a sudden vision of the virtues of the free market, the intolerable costs of conducting the Cold War and the deliberate efforts of Mikhail Gorbachev to dismantle the most rigid excesses of the Soviet state.

But few, if any, of the West's postmortems on the Soviet collapse have looked seriously at the political fallout of the Chernobyl crisis. In this April's *Scientific American*, Russian epidemiologist Yuri Scherbak, who now serves as the Ukrainian ambassador to the United States, pronounces that Chernobyl, as the single greatest accident in history, accelerated the Soviet Union's dissolution. Cher-

nobyl offered sudden evidence that the Soviet authorities had long been lying to Soviet citizens about the degree to which environmental abuses were killing them—and this, in the view of Scherbak and other critics, undermined the civil order that Gorbachev had been trying to shore up with his glasnost and perestroika reforms.

But to fully grasp Scherbak's point, it is necessary to consider the dramatic changes in mortality rates that took place well before Chernobyl happened. Evidence of this change first surfaced in a 1980 monograph by a U.S. Census Bureau expert on Soviet vital statistics, Dr. Murray Feshbach. His article, "Rising Infant Mortality in the USSR," reported that in the early '70s the Soviets were inexplicably failing to report an abrupt rise in their rates of infant mortality. He contrasted this sudden upward shift, which began in 1971, with the remarkable decline in infant mortality after World War II—from 81 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1950 to a low point of 23 in 1970. Thereafter, as the rate began an unexpected rise, the Soviets stopped submit-

ting infant mortality data to the United Nations for several years. Nor has this omission been rectified by the new rulers of the former Soviet Union. Current infant mortality rates are still not available, chiefly because the Chernobyl disaster has made such data for the Ukraine and Belarus highly problematic—more than one quarter of all newborns in these republics have such marked birth defects that many mothers are being advised to terminate pregnancies.

Despite such gaps in the official data, Feshbach has followed up his original 1980 research with a pair of books that demonstrate that the anomalous rise in Soviet mortality rates since 1970 can be attributed to the health effects of a monumental degree of environmental degradation. In his 1992 book *Ecocide in the USSR* (HarperCollins), Feshbach summarized the results of a close monitoring of Soviet press coverage of environmental abuses, including the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster of 1986.

Feshbach cited pediatric surveys in 1989 in the Bryansk province of the Russian republic that found "70 to 80 percent of the children up to the age of 14 suffering from severe headaches, unusual fatigue and depression." Their symptoms matched similar data from the Semipalatinsk test site in Kazakhstan and the Chelyabinsk region of the Urals, the site of a large-scale nuclear accident in 1957 that had long remained a state secret. (Boris Gusev, a physician who monitored the test site for the KGB, reported that Soviet bomb tests exposed more than 347,000 to lethal levels of radiation in their food and water.)

Most recently, Feshbach has edited an impressive *Environmental and Health Atlas of Russia* (PAIMS, Moscow, 1995). Several dozen Soviet scientists collaborated on the

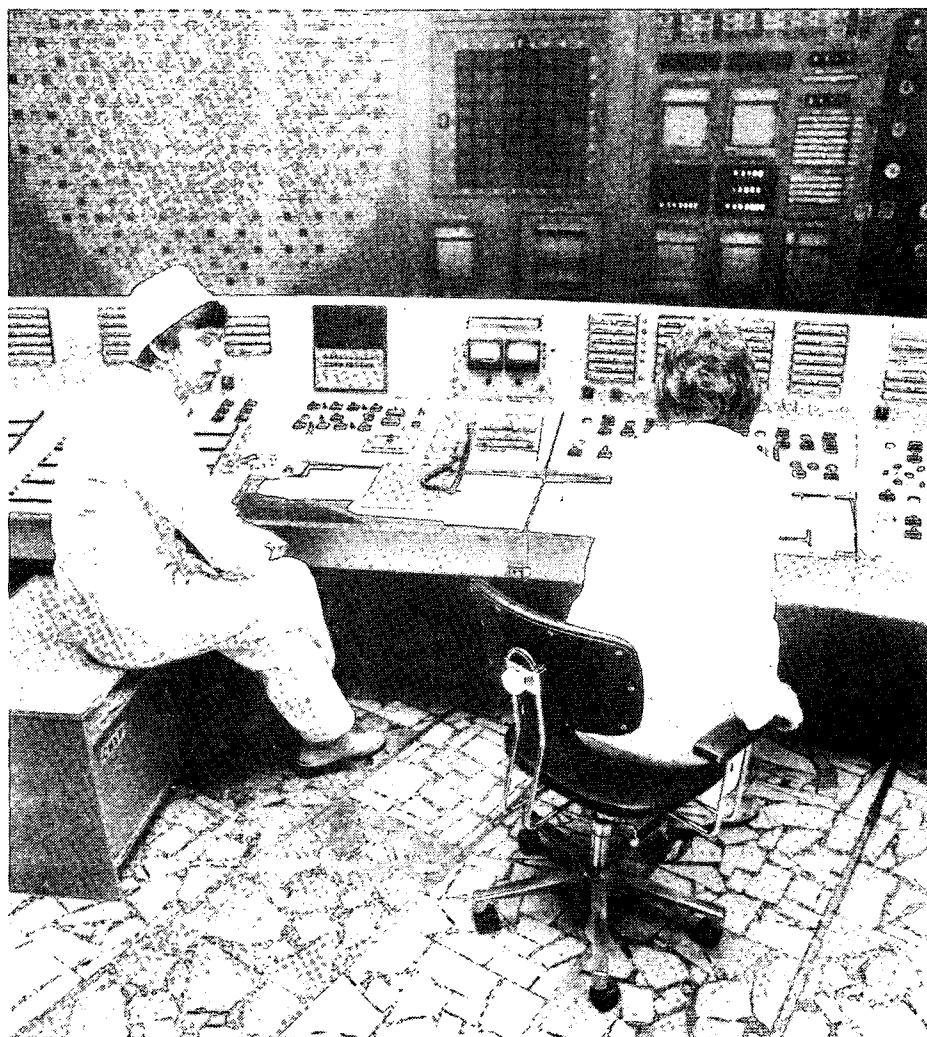
Atlas, under Feshbach's direction. The *Atlas* presents richly detailed maps that chart each Russian republic's concentration of radioactive and chemical pollution and the health risks arising from exposure. (The United States has no counterpart to such comprehensive geographic studies.)

The *Atlas* notes that "during the last 20 years, the number of newly detected cancer patients among urban dwellers increased 1.7 times," in sharp contrast with the far smaller 26 percent increase in Russia as a whole. This anomalous divergence between rural and urban cancer rates, evident in the United States too, validates Rachel Carson's prediction in *Silent Spring* that radioactive strontium is a "sinister partner" with industrial chemicals, more prevalent in urban than rural areas, greatly accelerating the process of carcinogenesis. This epidemiological link has always been the subject of great political controversy in the United States and the former Soviet Union alike, but in fact constitutes the great secret of the nuclear age.

Ecocide in the USSR and the Environmental and Health Atlas of Russia both indicate that the Soviet environmental crisis grew directly out of the extreme carelessness and secrecy of Soviet nuclear and industrial policy. According to Feshbach and other researchers, Soviet citizens were regularly exposed to the lethal effects of ionizing radiation from nuclear power reactors, as well as all other industrial pollutants. The Chernobyl accident was the most damaging incident of this official negligence, but as a close look at the relevant data indicates, it was far from atypical.

In 1994, the *New York Times* reported that Russian mortality rates had increased by 37 percent since the Chernobyl accident of 1986. Curious about the relationship of these figures to Feshbach's research, I asked Dr. Feshbach for his own estimates of annual Russian mortality rates to establish when the reported mortality deterioration actually began.

In Figure 1, I have plotted his estimates along with the corresponding U.S. crude mortality

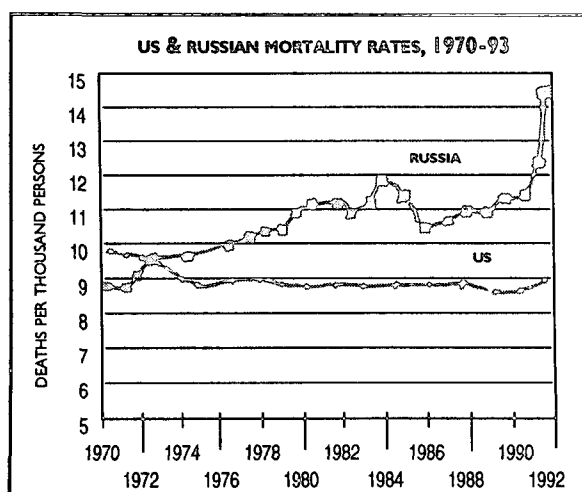


rates for comparison, which makes clear that the upsurge in Russian deaths after the 1986 Chernobyl accident actually came on the heels of a larger, anomalous rising trend that began in 1970. A similar pattern holds for Soviet infant mortality rates.

In Figure 2, I have plotted the decline and rise of Soviet infant mortality rates from 1951 to 1987, as officially reported

by I. Chasnikov, a member of the Kazakhstan Academy of Science, in the *Kazakhstan Pravda*, April-May 1991. Chasnikov's findings fully support the abrupt change described in Feshbach's 1980 monograph. But, following up on Carson's hunches, we have included in the chart the rise in the installed capacity in electrical wattage of the Soviet nuclear reactors after 1970 to explain both the sudden deterioration in infant mortality and total mortality rates. After Chernobyl, infor-

Continued on page 36



BLACK AMERICA

Explosions of hate

African-Americans are alarmed by a new upsurge in church firebombings.

By Salim Muwakkil

In late March, about two dozen ministers from several Southern states gathered at the King Center in Atlanta to protest national indifference to the rising number of firebomb attacks on black churches across the South. The ministers—whose churches had all been recently firebombed—demanded that the federal government, local law enforcement and national media embark on a campaign to increase public awareness of the firebombings, and to combat all forms of racist violence.

According to the Center for Democratic Renewal (CDR), an Atlanta-based group that monitors hate crimes and one of three sponsors of last month's event, 45 such burnings have been documented in 10 Southern states since 1992. And the pace is accelerating. A CDR report revealed that only one or two church bombings

occurred a year starting in 1972, when the group began gathering data, until 1994 when 15 took place. Ten churches were firebombed during the first two months of this year, the report noted, and three more were attacked in March. Since 1992, the group has documented church burnings in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

According to the report, the bombings are the handiwork of white supremacist groups that want to emulate the "night rider" racist of years past. "Many of those arrested belonged to groups such as the Aryan Faction, Skinheads for White Justice and the Ku Klux Klan," the report revealed. The CDR speculated that the burnings may have been carried out as part of an initiation of recruits. "Local, state and federal investigators need to be held accountable," for their poor performance in investigating these hate crimes, the report argued. "It is unconscionable that the majority of these cases remain unsolved."

Arrests have been made in only 12 of the 45 reported cases.

The firebombings have resurrected fears and memories of a not too distant time when such tactics were a routine response to the challenges of the civil rights movement. The 1963 bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., which killed four girls, was one of that era's most infamous incidents of racial violence. Historically, black churches were the hub of African-American civic life—and a key bastion of civil rights organizing. Hence, white supremacist groups typically target them for their high profile and potent symbolism.

Many observers believe that the current resumption of this venerable racist practice suggests white supremacist groups have been emboldened by an increasingly racist social climate. "The most important thing I think we can say is to put these incidents in the broader social context," explains Ron Daniels, executive director of the New York-based Center for Constitutional Rights. "The widespread economic anxiety is pushing people to look for scapegoats, and the politicians are fueling that search with their unprincipled rhetoric." Daniels is part of a coalition of groups called together by the National Council of Churches as an "emergency response team" to mount an independent investigation of the bombings.

"From what we've found so far, these assaults are clearly racially motivated, and it seems likely that there is some organized pattern of thought directing them," Daniels says. But federal law enforcement officials are in denial about the conspiratorial nature of the crimes. "Yes," he says decisively, "it is a conspiracy." For many years, researchers have pointed to an increased use of violence among neo-Nazi organizations, and most watchdog groups see the church

bombings as part of a concerted plan.

"These are acts of terrorism, and we hope the law enforcement officials will leave no stone unturned as they did [by investigating the bombing of the federal office building] in Oklahoma to try to bring the perpetrators to justice," says the Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The reference to Oklahoma City is not just a rhetorical point of comparison. Many civil rights advocates see strong links between the anti-government views of the burgeoning militia movement and the white supremacist beliefs of old-line racist groups.

The Montana Freemen, currently in the news for their standoff with federal agents, for example, subscribe to religious beliefs shared by many of the neo-Nazi groups that are proliferating across the country. The Freemen profess belief in the tenets of Christian Identity (i.e., non-whites are subhuman "mud people," Jews are the seeds of Satan and America is God's gift to the white race, among other things), which is also the official religion of the Rev. James Butler's Aryan Nations. In 1993, federal agents in Los Angeles arrested eight members of a group called the Fourth Reich Skinheads for planning to assassinate African-American and Jewish leaders and bomb a black church.

In addition to those explicit links between various militias and neo-Nazis, their views also find sympathy among many right-wing Americans, particularly those in law enforcement. "One of the reasons why federal authorities have been slow to describe the church bombings as domestic terrorism is their sympathy for the views of the bombers," Daniels charges. "Two agents were pulled off the investigation of a church burning in Knoxville, Tenn., because we revealed their participation in the racist Good Ol' Boys Roundup that took place in Tennessee."

The January 8 Knoxville incident, in which the Inner City Church was burned to the ground amid racist graffiti, finally pushed the growing problem out into the open. Because the Green Bay Packers' Reggie White is an associate pastor at the racially integrated church, the media devoted considerable attention to the firebombing. According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, 18 Molotov cocktails and about 75 gallons of gasoline and kerosene were used to destroy the church. Epithets spray painted on the church read, "Die, nigger, die" and "Nigger lovers."

The destruction of the Inner City church also fits a pattern. "Integrated churches infuriate white supremacists, and they often face the greatest danger for daring to bust long-standing racial taboos," Daniels says. Including the Inner City church, five black or integrated churches have been firebombed in Tennessee in the last year. But despite the overwhelming evidence that racial motives were at work, local state and federal law enforcement officials have been reluctant to tag these firebombings as hate crimes. In fact, according to the Rev. David Upton, senior pastor of Inner City, "[Federal investigators] talked to us like we were the ones who started the fire."

The National Council of Churches' emergency coalition

will attempt to mobilize public opinion to force a more aggressive investigation, and Daniels' Center for Constitutional Rights will help devise legal strategies to harshen the penalties of those eventually charged with the bombings.

Daniels says the coalition and others also are concerned about raising funds to help rebuild the many churches destroyed by this new surge of racist violence. A planned June demonstration in Washington, D.C., will underline the gravity of the problem, according to Daniels. "America is a nation in full denial," he says, "and we intend to bring the maximum amount of attention to this problem." Daniels is right about the country's state of denial, but it's nothing new. Whenever economic pressures strain the social fabric, racial scapegoating and immigrant-bashing become attractive ways for many to divert attention from the real sources of social tension. Rather than rationally addressing the crucial concerns at the heart of our discontent, politicians prefer to fan the flames of xenophobia.

But these are times of profound cultural anxiety. In such a climate, those flames easily could get out of hand and engulf our society. The widespread popularity of right-wing anti-government views provides a fertile field for the spread of allied but much more corrosive white supremacist sentiments. "If this country fails to aggressively confront the fascist menace in our midst today, we'll wake up one day and find we were too late," Daniels says. "I intend to do all I can to force that confrontation."

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I N T H E A R T S

Cupidity's arrows

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just how
sleazy
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can be.*

By Pat Dowell

Free enterprise is alive and well—but also very, very sick, to judge by the sly nonfiction movie that British director Nick Broomfield has made about America's most famous prostitute. He documents with deadpan sincerity the internecine squabbles of the West Coast demimonde that Fleiss briefly dominated as an upstart entrepreneur, before she embarked on her new career as celebrity defendant.

Armed with camera and sound crew, a disarmingly diffident manner and great wads of cash, Broomfield arrives in Los Angeles at the height of Heidi's courtroom notoriety and begins to film immediately his quest for an interview with the Madam herself. His avowed goal is to find out what she's really like. The cash is for loosening the tongues of folks who routinely charge by the hour for human interaction of any sort.

Broomfield gets to talk to just about everyone except Heidi (until the end of the movie), but he is a persistent guy with an apparently boundless tolerance for sleaze. And the cast of characters here will surely test yours. They run the gamut from call girls to porn stars to various paid friends and hangers-on of the principals. (Among the latter, oddly, is Peter Sellers' daughter Victoria, erstwhile friend and roommate to Heidi, and a pathetically stereotypical coastal airhead.)

But Sellers is a minnow among the sharks, a fact that becomes obvious once Broomfield gets around to the main attractions, the two sleaze titans who overshadow Heidi herself—a pair of older Hungarian émigrés named Madame Alex and Ivan Nagy. Both end up locked in mortal combat over controlling Broomfield's narrative. Madame Alex is a genuine legend—the woman Heidi unseated, the original Madam to the stars of an older generation. She recounts how Heidi was “sold” to her for \$500 by Nagy, who was then Fleiss' lover, as well as a pimp with

showbiz aspirations.

Madame Alex receives Broomfield in the bedroom of her nondescript suburban tract house, hovering over her bedside phone. She is a squat, squishy toad of a woman, pale and unblinking, who may never have seen the light of day. The more she opens her mouth, the more a kind of venom issues from it: She tells Broomfield that Nagy and his protégée schemed all along to steal her business. She even accuses Nagy of making off with her furniture and her jewelry.

Nagy, meanwhile, is now a “filmmaker” with a middle-age paunch, a leering smile and an oily demeanor of continental urbanity—the sort of person, in other words, that the word “Eurotrash” was invented to describe. (Nagy's latest skin flick lovingly follows the career of a serial killer who flays hookers, and he's even made a nudie CD-ROM titled “Heidi's Girls.”) Over the course of the movie, Nagy's initial charm and culture give way to something rawer and more calculating under the director's patient, almost befuddled questioning. Broomfield ping-pongs between Nagy and Alex, trying out each one's outrageous accusations on the other. He plies them both for the facts behind those bullet holes in Nagy's ceiling, the reports that he beat Fleiss and other prostitutes, the identity of a mysterious ex-Mossad thug named Cookie who runs a pager shop—and most of the call girls in Hollywood as well. You can't make this stuff up: It's every slimy TV movie about hookers come to life.

In the movie's most amusing irony, Broomfield's dogged questions—he asks the same ones over and over in hopes of reconciling contradictions—leads both Madame Alex and Nagy to lose patience with him. Each treats him fondly like an idiot nephew for a while, but before long they are openly

berating him for not being very bright. He gets the last laugh (and so do we), since the movie gives ample testament to his shrewdness in drawing them out. But a further irony is that these unflattering shifts of temperament probably come across to Nagy and Madame Alex (if they've seen Broomfield's film) as triumphs of their respective star qualities.

Even as he navigates his way through the many layers of imperious self-absorption—and self-deception—that envelop the Fleiss tale, Broomfield never flinches or blows up. The only time something like indignation clouds his brow is when he finally gets close enough to Heidi (at her new clothing shop) to interview her. A lacquered television “reporter” from Los Angeles’ Channel 5, who has exhausted all her softballs on Heidi, turns to the scruffy waiting crew from the BBC to demand “Who are *you*?” Mention of the BBC fails to light her dim bulb, and she cannot believe that he has spent six months on a film about Heidi Fleiss. Not that she questions the scale of it, I suspect, but because she can’t imagine that any journalism project would require so much concentration and so little wardrobe.

Broomfield just hangs in there with the camera and the tape recorder going, picking up the fading end of every sordid deal, for if this movie is about anything, it is the extent to which every interaction in American society, from newsgathering to love, has become a financial transaction, and every emotion, from shame to desire to hatred, has become a commodity. That observation won’t stop the presses, but Broomfield’s understated diligence rubs our noses in it as no other filmmaker can (or, perhaps, will).

Like his 1992 film, *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer*, this film is an essay about marketing an image via the news business. Broomfield films everyone taking his money for their interviews, and the technique pays off with what turned out to be my favorite moment in the movie, an untoppable snapshot of venality and moral hypocrisy: former LAPD chief Daryl Gates scooping up his stack of bills from the top of a hotel dresser, just like any other hooker.

Broomfield interviews Gates because eventually he comes around to the notion that Heidi Fleiss was singled out for prosecution under a law tailored by Gates, but seldom actually used. The procuring statute afforded the chief a stick with which to beat confidential information out of the town’s madams and pimps, who fed a pipeline of sleaze



Heidi Fleiss
Hollywood Madame
Directed by Nick Broomfield

straight to the cops. The implication is that Heidi wouldn’t play the game with the police. As a result, LA’s finest were ready and able when Fleiss’ rival flesh-peddlers, notably Madame Alex and Nagy, engineered her arrest.

Heidi seems almost wholesome next to these folks, and when Broomfield finally gets her to talk, she does appear to be far more human than her co-stars. Until, that is, Broomfield presses her on her relationship with Nagy. She has a thing for older men, it comes out, and Nagy, despite the punishment he has meted out in every way, is still her playmate—even after she is convicted in court largely through his machinations. She denies the continuation of this perverse attraction at first but Nagy urges on Broomfield all the proof he can muster, including taped phone calls, and live ones that he lets Broomfield listen in on. (You should stay through the final credits for the final twist in this dispute.)

The crowning transaction of *Heidi Fleiss Hollywood Madam* is, of course, plunking down your own 6 or 7 dollars to witness this gutter reverie. It is the kind of experience that makes you want to shower on the way out of the theater, but it has a kind of social usefulness, too. With Heidi Fleiss’ story for his brush, Broomfield dirties the glamour of celebrity and the romance of the camera. Show business has never looked more professional or less inviting. ◀

I N P R I N T

Old news

By David Futrelle

Americans seem to take a certain masochistic pleasure in being told their country is going to hell—particularly if the person making the accusation blames someone other than them for the country's predicament. Cotton Mather blamed Satan; Allan Bloom blamed the Sixties; contemporary critics tend to blame the media.

The "liberal media," to be more specific. Though left-leaning media critics have long been reporting on the media's strikingly illiberal tendencies, the critics with the largest audience today are conservatives like Rush Limbaugh and Pat Buchanan—as much performers as pundits, reeling off snap judgments and one-liners with the practiced timing of expert comedians.

And so the appearance of two books of media criticism by journalists with impeccably liberal credentials might seem, at the least, a welcome change from the endless ravings of the Dittohead army. Howard Kurtz, the media reporter for the *Washington Post*, checks in with *Hot Air*, a 400-page jeremiad denouncing the "talkathon culture" that clogs our airwaves. And James Fallows, the Washington editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, clocks in with a smaller and somewhat smarter book, *Breaking the News*, describing the many ways "the media undermine American democracy."

Unfortunately, the news Kurtz and Fallows deliver is mostly old news: elite journalists are subtly corrupted by corporate money and political "access," so entangled in the ins and outs of Washington insiderhood and so indebted (often quite literally) to the corporate powers that be that they cannot possibly write or talk about politics or economics with anything close to the necessary detachment.

True, too true. But also not a terribly original notion. Indeed, there's not much in Kurtz's book that is anything close to new. Though Kurtz has done a great deal of what he likes to call "shoe-leather" reporting, he hasn't stopped terribly long to think about the facts and quotes he's collected; the book is a long-winded and unreflective collection of hor-

ror stories and moral judgments; Kurtz seems to specialize in the blindingly obvious. He reveals, among other things, that *The McLaughlin Group* is noisy and unilluminating; five minutes watching the show would convince most people of that. And his explanations for the current morass are less than illuminating themselves. "In a talk-show nation," Kurtz concludes, "viewers want to be entertained."

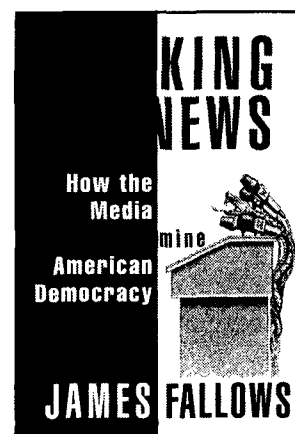
The book shares many of the same tendencies Kurtz deplores in the media. Kurtz presents us with no opinions we haven't heard a dozen times before; his writing is aggressively simple-minded, filled with easily digestible soundbites and the inevitable clichés. His idea of bold writing is to string two or more clichés into a sentence of their own: "Let's face it: Talk is cheap."

Though his facts are old and his opinions are conventional—Geraldo is a "gutter" journalist, Ted Koppel is an "uncanny" interviewer—Kurtz's book is not altogether without its charms. Buried amid the rubble of facts are a few choice tidbits, including Morton Kondracke's recollection that when Bob Novak "gets in a tizzy" he "exudes an odor ... like a musk ox."

Fallows' book is broader in scope and more carefully argued, exploring subjects ranging from the mind-numbing pressures of the daily "news cycle" to the rise of "news as spectacle." His writings on the subtle politics of Beltway "access" are insightful, even though the subject itself is old. "What the reporter needs from today's access deal is, simply, *material*," Fallows writes. "If he is a talk-show regular, he needs to be able to call up a State Department official on Friday morning and get a nugget about Iraq or China he can use on that weekend's show."

But journalists pay for such access—flattering their sources and giving them an easy time, developing an easy receptivity to this or that governmental spin. "[T]he access bargain has become journalism's equivalent to plea bargaining in court," Fallows concludes. "The authorities can make things easy for you or they can make them tough, depending on how much you cooperate with them."

If one is willing to sort through much that is overly familiar, both books offer ample ammunition to liberals and lefties as frustrated by the media establishment as Rush Limbaugh claims to be (though for



Breaking the News:
How the Media
Undermine American
Democracy
By James Fallows
Pantheon
296 pp., \$23

**Hot Air: All Talk,
All the Time**
By Howard Kurtz
Times Books
407 pp., \$25

altogether different reasons).

The most unsettling chapters in both books describe the strange politics of the increasingly lucrative lecture circuit. Celebrity journalists—better known for soundbites on talk shows than for writing or reporting—are in high demand at large corporate dinners and other such events, and have turned themselves (without the slightest ethical qualms) into what Fallows calls “pundit profit centers.”

Kurtz details horror stories that are indeed horrible to behold: how Fred Barnes accepted a lucrative speaking engagement at a convention of the American Managed Care and Review Association—after suggesting on *The McLaughlin Group* and in the pages of *The American Spectator* that the health care crisis was a myth; how Cokie Roberts (ABC) and her husband Stephen Roberts (*U.S. News and World Report*) pocketed \$45,000 after appearing at a breakfast and luncheon held by Chicago’s Northern Trust Bank.

Even the most cynical press-watchers cannot help but be startled by the sheer amount of money involved. Kurtz reports that David Gergen, then a MacNeil/Lehrer commentator, pulled in nearly half a million dollars from speaking engagements in 1992, sharing his wisdom with everyone from the Chase Manhattan Bank to the Cosmetics and Toiletries Association. And the explanations given by the journalists involved are hardly reassuring. “It’s potentially corrupting, but so is everything,” former *Crossfire* co-host Michael Kinsley told Kurtz. “We are private citizens,” explained David Brinkley. “I’m a private citizen,” said Chris Wallace. “I’m not an elected official,” said Fred Barnes.

Such glib rationalizations say a great deal about the cynicism of many in the media elite, looking down their noses at an audience they believe is gullible enough to swallow such patent nonsense. Fallows ends his book with a plea for journalists to move beyond such simple cynicism, to remember their commitment to real public service.

Fallows’ conclusion, bland as it is, has drawn a vehement reaction from Howell Raines of the *New York Times*, who seems to think the call for “public journalism” means an attempt to hitch journalistic “objectivity” to the agenda of this or that politician—what Raines calls “lackey” journalism. True, there are times—particularly in his discussion of Clinton’s health care initiative—when Fallows almost seems to suggest that the public would have done better had the media looked the other way. But overall, the point of his book is to argue for sharper scrutiny of politics—truly aggressive reporting, not simply aggressive posturing.

Indeed, if anyone can be accused of unreflective elitism, it

is Kurtz. Though Kurtz affects a similar populism, he tends to write about the talk-show culture the way a nervous mandarin might write about the barbarians at the gate. Talk shows, he complains, have “become an alternate message-delivery system for conservatives determined to bypass the

mainstream media, for blacks trying to circumvent the dominant white culture, and for an assortment of fringe characters who would otherwise remain on the margins of society.”

Working himself into something of a lather, Kurtz complains that our country is slipping into “one great, roaring Oprahfied ooze of headlines and hype,” that talk



shows have plunged us “into the great tabloid swamp populated by the likes of Heidi Fleiss and Lorena Bobbitt and Tonya Harding and Paula Jones.” The more psychologically minded might want to inquire as to why Kurtz’s examples of “sleaze” are so often female. (Fallows similarly complains that “the Sunday morning shows have put on rouge and push-up bras,” though he doesn’t say who is wearing what.)

In any case, Kurtz’s revulsion at the talk shows leads him to dismiss perfectly legitimate programs along with their sensationalistic counterparts. Incredibly, Kurtz shoves an undeniably serious show about a woman fighting for the right to care for her disabled lesbian lover into a list of “some of Donahue’s less edifying shows,” alongside tabloid fodder like “Incredible Love Triangle: Man Marries his Mother-in-Law.”

It’s not that surprising that Kurtz is alarmed by the new “populism,” if that’s what it is, for he seems to think most viewers are little more than gullible dupes. “One of the magnetic attractions of talk-show democracy is the sense that it gives voice to views and information that big-shot media executives deem inappropriate for public consumption,” he writes. “This sort of information is often unfair, unrealistic and unsubstantiated, but perhaps that is part of its appeal. The danger is when millions of viewers and listeners treat all the hot air as absolute truth.”

The thing is, they don’t. Most people are far more critical of what they see and hear than Kurtz acknowledges; they may at times have a taste for the gaudy and the sensational—who doesn’t?—but they resent being talked down to. No journalist who doesn’t understand this can ever hope to produce public-minded journalism worthy of the name. We deserve better, not just from our media, but from our media critics. ◀

Keeping private lives private

By Jeffrey L. Reynolds

As a member of America's most notorious family of lawyers, Caroline Kennedy seems well positioned to lament the modern-day assaults on personal privacy that have severely diminished what Louis Brandeis once described as "the right to be let alone." Though we've always known far more about the Kennedy clan than perhaps even our own families, *The Right to Privacy* isn't a whiny first-person protest about the high personal costs of fame. In fact, Kennedy ducks the spotlight completely, collaborating with fellow Columbia Law School graduate Ellen Alderman to recount a long litany of dramatic violations that have torn apart the lives of average people.

Realizing that only academics and insomniacs would appreciate yet another compendium of constitutional and privacy tort case law, Kennedy and Alderman bring the abstract arguments about privacy down to earth in engaging, accessible ways. In so doing, they reprise the reader-friendly formula that made their 1991 collaboration, *In Our Defense: The Bill of Rights in Action*, a best-seller. The carefully crafted *Right to Privacy* also makes for a nice read, but leaves the impression that the authors are probably better journalists than they are lawyers. They offer no passionate calls for greater vigilance in the protection of our most cherished and fundamental right, only a strategically selected catalogue of horror stories designed to stand on their own and speak for themselves.

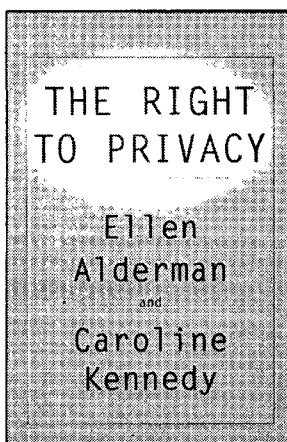
In some cases, they do. Take, for example, the story of 32-year-old Joan W., who made a wrong turn on the way to the Chicago Art Institute, was stopped by the police, arrested for unpaid parking tickets and subjected to a dehumanizing body-cavity strip search back at the precinct. Joan's terrifying experience, it turns out, wasn't unique; she was one of several thousand who had quietly endured the same humiliation since 1952, when the city implemented a blanket policy of strip searches for all women, regardless of their alleged violations. Men, on the other hand, were simply

"patted down" unless police had a clear reason to go further. In 1979, Joan and several other women sued the city, claiming the searches violated the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable search and seizure, as well as the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. Despite the plaintiffs' resounding victory against Chicago in 1984, police in nearby Calumet City defiantly continued blanket strip searches until 1990, when a district court judge specifically ordered them to stop, invoking not only the earlier decision but common sense as well.

Like virtually everyone else who has written on the topic, Kennedy and Alderman point out that the word "privacy" never appears in the Constitution, but that the Fourth Amendment "right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects" provides shelter from government intrusion, as do 14th Amendment provisions prohibiting the denial of "life, liberty and property without due process of law." Whether or not these provisions should be interpreted as a constitutional right to privacy is an age-old question that provokes passionate reactions on both sides, especially when applied to medical and reproductive decisions.

Such dilemmas have invariably centered on the beginning and end of life. Forced contraception, reproductive choice, control over frozen embryos, the prosecution of addicted pregnant women, the right to refuse medical treatment, the right to die and the legality of assisted suicide are just some of the issues that have found their way into courtrooms across the country. These issues also form the basis for a well-assembled chapter called "Privacy and Your Self." Though the mix of highly publicized and lesser-known cases appears virtually without editorial comment, the image they conjure—of courts, cops and lawyers bumbling about blindly at our bedsides—is enough to shake even the most jaded out of complacency.

A dozen or so other compelling search and seizure cases confirm civil libertarians' greatest fears about the intrusive power of government and set the stage for some long-overdue rational discussion about the "get tough on crime" rhetoric that has given law enforcement personnel blanket permission to run roughshod over anything that stands in their way—including the Constitution. Unfortunately, Kennedy and Alderman never engage in such a discussion. Indeed, if anything, they seem to share some of the same constitutional blind spots as the "get tough" crowd. When it comes to questionable drug interdiction tactics in New



The Right to Privacy
By Ellen Alderman and
Caroline Kennedy
Alfred A. Knopf
405 pp., \$26.95

York's Port Authority Bus Terminal, for example, we hear a lot less about the sacrosanctity of the Fourth Amendment. The tales of woe here come not from violated citizens, but from frustrated cops who bemoan legal restrictions on stopping and searching passengers who "appear nervous, run up to pay for their ticket in cash and hop on the bus at the last minute."

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Americans have always endured, if not enjoyed, a fickle love/hate relationship with government. In short, we want government not only off our backs, but also on our side when it comes to protecting us from unwanted intrusions. Our relationship with the press is virtually identical: We want to know every detail about today's universal injustices, national scandals and neighborhood sex squabbles—unless, of course, the spotlight comes too close to our own lives. Then, we readily join the endless stream of naysayers—that seems to include Kennedy and Alderman—who have lined up against the First Amendment to point an accusing finger at the "irresponsible media" that have suddenly become a little too free for our taste.

Though the authors highlight the intrinsic conflict between uncensored information and unfettered personal privacy, they make their case for greater privacy by detailing the personal pitfalls of people who feel they've been overexposed and victimized by the press. The cases are handled sensitively, consent has been secured and some names have been changed. Still, a duplicitous irony remains: The authors would likely argue that printing 100,000 copies of this book with stirring stories about a woman who recoils in horror when her dying husband's final moments find their way onto the evening news, or that of a businessman whose randomly snapped photo shows up as part of a *New York Times Magazine* cover story with which he disagrees, will serve some greater good in the protection of privacy. By highlighting these less compelling cases, Kennedy and Alderman put them on a par with more egregious abuses.

The most ridiculous case is probably that of Jeannie Braun and her swimming pig named Ralph. During the 1970s, Braun had trained Ralph to perform aquatic antics for 2,000 to 3,000 poolside visitors a day at a Texas amusement park. One of those visitors happened to be an editor from the Larry Flynt-published *Chic* magazine, who picked up a promotional postcard featuring the headlining pair, found it amusing, and, with the park's permission,

printed it in the skin mag's humorous "Chic Thrills" section. After seeing the contents of the magazine, however, Braun lost her sense of humor and sued Flynt for defamation and invasion of privacy under false light—the doctrine that adverse publicity can give a false impression of a person's character. Though she eventually won, the Texas Supreme Court threw out false light torts in 1994.

The authors expertly simplify the distinction between the constitutional right to privacy that protects "we the people" from government intrusion and the privacy torts that protect us from each other. These latter cases were founded on state statutes and a complex patchwork of court rulings, which Kennedy and Alderman detail through a close examination of credit reporting, polygraphs, drug tests, psychological profiles, lifestyle screening, wiretapping, computer monitoring and a whole host of other workplace intrusions.

The more pressing question of what the information revolution portends for the privacy rights of Americans receives surprisingly cursory treatment here. The authors acknowledge that current technological advances, if left unchecked, pose today's most insidious threats to privacy. But Kennedy and Alderman appear to raise the white flag in the face of such threats. They end their lukewarm and dispassionate volume with these words of quiet resignation: "With so much information available at a keystroke, it is now inescapable that there will be times when what is whispered in the closet will indeed be proclaimed from the housetops."

To be fair, Kennedy and Alderman do fulfill their modest book-jacket promise to "make an urgent and complicated issue more absorbing and accessible than ever before." For casual readers, the eloquent simplicity and popular appeal may be enough. Others, however, will be left longing for the thoughtful analysis and stronger defense that current times and technologies demand.

Jeffrey L. Reynolds is a freelance writer and serves on the board of directors of the Suffolk County Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union.

Machine dreams

By Pat Aufderheide

Global but in many cases not yet local, a monument to institutional leadership as well as to anarchistic engineering wizardry and entrepreneurship, a potential boon or blight to today's information have-nots, the Internet has become the latest example of our love-hate relationship with technology.

But as exciting—and horrifying—as the Internet may be, it is only one aspect of the vast social changes being triggered by recent developments in technology and in the business world. The phone company, for instance, is now ready to be your cable TV programmer, and the local radio station wants to sell you a paging service. You might get Internet service on your cable TV line, and home shopping on your computer. The local newspaper may be testing electronic delivery via a website, and can't wait to repackage its data in audio and video form—making it a kind of radio and TV station as well. If you'd like to be paged when your kind of news comes through, they'd like to do that for you, too.

The recent Telecommunications Reform Act establishes, finally, some rules of play for this new game, bringing with it earthshaking changes in the way policy works—and in the ways citizens can participate in it. The law's basic message is that the public interest is served when there is vigorous market competition that stirs innovation, expands service and lowers prices. The legislation lets phone companies, broadcasters and cable companies leap into each other's businesses, so long as there's some kind of competition. It cavalierly junks some time-honored assumptions—that broadcasters should be closely linked to the local community, for instance. And it encourages the big to get even bigger.

Not surprisingly, the bill was largely based on the wish list of the telecommunications industry, which has pumped unprecedented amounts of money into congressional campaigns over the last three years. But the Telecommunications Act is more than a mere corporate giveaway. It is an ideological manifesto—modeled on the arguments of right-wing thinkers like Newt Gingrich and George Gilder—that

is aimed at making competition the central policy good from which all other good things flow.

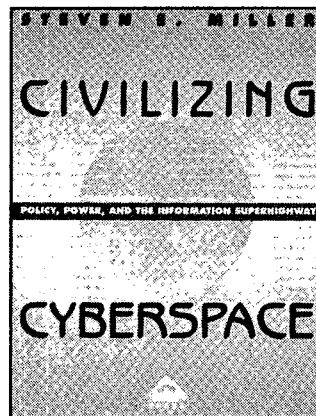
Public-interest advocates found themselves ever more marginalized as the legislation evolved—a fact that must alarm Richard Sclove, an advocate of the democratic deployment of technology who appears regularly in cyberspace (<http://www.amherst.edu/~loka>). In *Democracy and Technology*, Sclove argues that technology development is inherently political, and that it must be accompanied by a strong democracy in which citizens participate in all basic decisions facing society. He wants democratic control of technologies to extend beyond formal politics and into the workplace and home. Sclove lays out a number of abstract but well-reasoned criteria for how this techno-democracy should function. Technology, he argues, should be flexible, locally controlled, decentralized and ecologically sustainable.

He also examines potential models for this new world order. But, while provocative, his examples—from Amish farming (good) to Chernobyl (bad) to a Spanish village where the installation of running water killed off social life around the well (oops)—are often frustratingly thin. And readers might be pardoned, especially in the wake of the Telecommunications Act, for not sharing the author's sunny faith in the ability of local democracy (informed, of course, by an opta-

tive federalism) to confront the greed, resources and relentlessness of megacorporations and megagovernment.

On the other end of the spectrum from Sclove's logic and lists are the impassioned essays and poems found in *Hacking the Future* by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. (You have a choice of buying the book in the form of a rather ordinary CD with readings and musical background or in the old-fashioned but ever-so-portable form of a random-access text.) The Krokeros rail against the "exterminatory character of the times," portraying a "life-and-death struggle" between an ethical future and an unprecedented and ruthless form of "despotic capitalism." Delirium, rapture and despair mix with social analysis in what is ultimately a compelling case for not just sitting back and letting the "techno-elite" take us for a ride.

Steven Miller's *Civilizing*



Democracy and Technology

By Richard E. Sclove
Guilford Press
338 pp., \$18.95

Hacking the Future

By Arthur and Marilouise Kroker
St. Martin's Press
143 pp., \$19.95

Civilizing Cyberspace: Power, Policy and the Information Superhighway

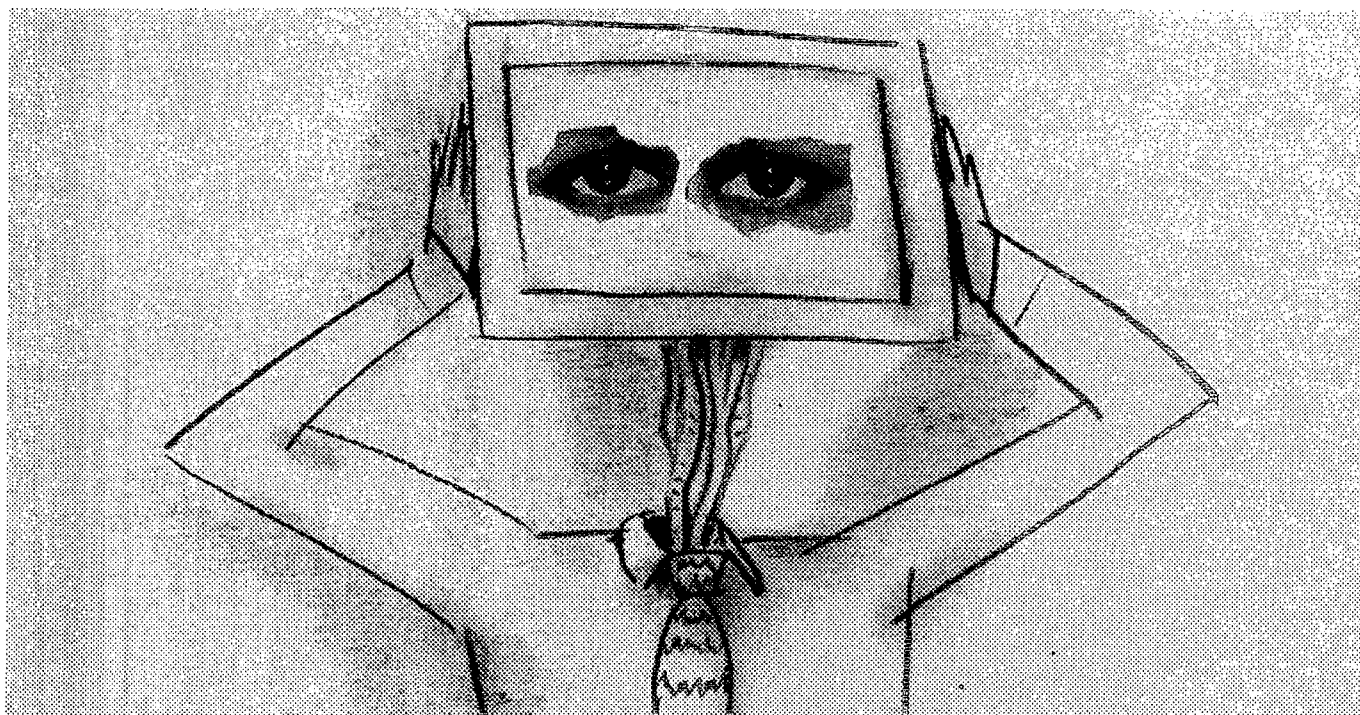
By Steven E. Miller
ACM Press
413 pp., \$26.85

Cyberspace, meanwhile, is a valuable commonsense how-to guide for fighting that elite. Those who have spent the last few years in the slough of despond known as public-interest telecom policy have to be deeply grateful to Miller, an info-technology consultant who is on the board of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility. He has taken complicated issues—such as privacy, the structure of networks, the role for nonprofit communication and the attempt to define universal service—and distilled them with clarity and grace.

Miller opens his book by demystifying that grand-sounding policy-wonk term, “national information infrastructure,” and describing alternative scenarios for how it

service” (affordable, society-wide access to communication) and “open platforms” (interlinking of networks so that communication can flow in any direction).

To bolster and counterpoint his arguments, Miller concludes his chapters with mini-interviews of cyberspace experts ranging from Internet co-designer Vint Cerf to Ivan G. Seidenberg, the chairman of Nynex. One of the most provocative of these discussions is with the 21st Century Project’s Gary Chapman, who says that middle-class fascination with the national information infrastructure will be a self-indulgent diversion if it is not framed within much larger social questions. “What the



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might develop. There’s no built-in technical reason why we should wind up with novelist William Gibson’s dystopian vision of perpetual surveillance of citizens and infoapartheid. On the other hand, there’s no guarantee that we’ll get Al Gore’s highly preferable world of wired schools and flexible work schedules. In short, the future is still largely up for grabs—and despite recent setbacks, progressive forces can help shape it.

We’ve got history to draw on, Miller points out. There’s plenty of precedent for policies based on government’s traditional role in regulation of key industries, subsidization of production or consumption in various markets and construction of infrastructures. Free-market libertarians need not dictate the future.

Miller appears to be what he calls a “progressive communitarian.” That is, he believes that in a necessarily mixed market, “the overall tone and direction [should be] clearly set by the public sector acting in the public interest rather than by corporations acting in self-interest.” Central to his vision of a high-tech society are the concepts of “universal

homeless need are homes,” he argues, “not e-mail to talk about homelessness.” Miller doesn’t disagree, but he does make an eloquent case that the design of telecommunications technology both conditions and is conditioned by social inequities.

Oddly, *Civilizing Cyberspace* doesn’t include a where-to-go-from-here bibliography or organizational directory—not even a site for Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (it’s <http://www.cpsr.org>). Fortunately, cyberspace already includes a growing number of valuable info-advocacy outposts. Among them are the Benton Foundation (<http://www.cdinet.com/benton>), the Center for Democracy and Technology (<http://www.cdt.org>) and the Electronic Frontier Foundation (<http://www.eff.org>). Each of these sites has plenty of links to other helpful sources of information and activism. Also, the Washington-based Center for Media Education’s printed newsletter, InfoActive (give them feedback at infoactive@cme.org), regularly tracks creative uses of info-tech for nonprofit organizing, and it lists new sites. We can use them all. ◀

Continued from page 5
nism of Pat Aufderheide.

Is that an outrageous, bullshit assertion? It sure is. Yet it is the same argument and the same level of evidence that *In These Times* allowed Jim Sleeper to make about *The Village Voice's* decision to move to free distribution in Manhattan ("A muffled *Voice*," March 18). Sleeper, a onetime marginal *Voice* writer with a pocketful of payback, is of course entitled to his opinions, no matter how grudge-driven and uninformed they may be. But *In These Times*, a noble tribune of progressive thought, besmirches itself by reproducing Sleeper's flurry of illogic and bile.

Sleeper slams the *Voice's* investigative journalism for devolving into "relentless smearing of enemies dubiously chosen," a point he illustrates by recounting a rambling, 14-year-old anecdote involving Jack Newfield—who left the *Voice* nearly a decade ago—the gist of which seems to be that we carry water for Mario Cuomo. Please: Do not rely on the memories lighting the corners of Sleeper's troubled mind about the way we were. The reality is that the *Voice* runs investigative stories on anyone, political friend or foe; within a year of endorsing David Dinkins, we published a cover story with Dave's picture, headlined: "Look Who's Screwing Us Now!" Wayne Barrett, the only *Voice* journalist on Sleeper's hit list who actually still works here, went after corruption in the Dinkins and Cuomo administrations just as feverishly and effectively as he did in the dreaded Koch administration—you could look it up, even if Sleeper didn't.

If Sleeper doesn't like the tone or substance of *Voice* investigations, that's his choice. But I wish *In These Times* had asked Sleeper what the *Daily News* was doing during the years Sleeper worked there to combat the "decadent" journalistic cancer that *The Village Voice* was inflicting on New York readers. As I recall, the *News* endorsed a Republican mayor and a Republican governor, screamed on its front page for the death penalty, gutted its union, accused a rape com-

plainant of fabricating her story for political reasons—none of which, judging from his columns, perturbed Sleeper. I strongly sense it ain't investigative journalism that disturbs Sleeper: it's that he blinded himself to his own political compromises.

Sleeper admits in his conclusion that he no longer reads the *Voice*, even articles that attack him. The neglect is consistent: aside from one column by Michael Tomasky—who no longer works for the *Voice*—Sleeper's dusty tirade does not refer to a single *Voice* article from the 1990s. I wonder—would *In These Times* have a book or film critic brag that they'd avoided the work they were writing about?

Don't misconstrue this letter as a partisan defense: I agree that the *Voice* has many shortcomings. They would be more persuasively illuminated by a critic who's actually read the paper lately. I would have thought *In These Times* had enough respect for readers to find such a person, and I am sad to discover that you don't.

James Ledbetter
Staff Writer, *The Village Voice*
New York City

Nobody's fool

I called my old buddy Jim Sleeper after reading his latest in an obsessive series on *The Village Voice* to try to make a point or two on my own behalf.

I asked him during our friendly chat—with him repeatedly referring to me as a "fool"—why he included my name in the conclusions he drew from the alleged Ickes incident he described when, by his own account, I was not a party to it. I asked him how I could have "learned from the Ickes gambit"—as he suggested in his piece I should have—if I never even knew it occurred? I also wanted to know why he did not mention, in his second allusion to me, that I never wrote the piece involving Jim Traub that I supposedly "grilled him" about, nor did he mention what "the

deviation from *Voice* orthodoxy was" that I called Traub to discuss. I questioned Traub about a *New Yorker* piece he did celebrating the first year of Gov. George Pataki.

Sleeper had no answer to any of these questions. All he did was laugh at me and deride my phone call as pathetic. I have no idea what his critique of my journalism is, since he has not cited a single example of favoritism or falsehood in it, but he is certainly in no position to criticize anyone for letting a personal agenda contaminate reporting. His Giuliani salutes at the *News*, like his 13-year swipes at the *Voice*, are a monument to contract copy.

Wayne Barrett
Senior Editor, *The Village Voice*
New York City

Jim Sleeper responds: Poor Ledbetter and Barrett; they can't stop themselves from proving my point, in the essay, that Voice muckrakers "seemed unable to sustain a political argument without savaging the adversary's integrity ... often by constructing webs of guilt by association so elaborate they amounted to pathological lying in the idiom of an exposé." I also wrote that they engaged in political skullduggery off the printed page.

Guys, give it up. The world is onto you. Of the thousands who read my article, not only in ITT, which originated it, but also on an Internet discussion group and in the libertarian New York Press, only two people, Ledbetter and Barrett, bothered to defend the paper. (On the Internet, people exchanged "Can you top this?" stories about why they'd given up on the Voice. No one had a good word for it.) Ledbetter's and Barrett's assertions are so patently dishonest that I have nothing to say to anyone who finds anything credible in them.

In fairness, their letters call do reveal a truth I didn't mention: These guys can dish out criticism, but they can't take it—even when it's tempered with elegiac mercy, as mine was.

Auto-matic for the people

We are grateful that after seven long years of organizing around the insurance issue, *In These Times* has seen fit to report on our pioneering efforts ("Car talk," March 4).

Considering the scope and length of our efforts to organize the mainly blue-collar Baltimore community, the various twists and turns of our efforts and the mostly ineffective mud-slinging campaign (when truth and logic fails, try slander) on the part of those in and those who serve the power structure—journalist Deirdre Shesgreen did a creditable job.

It might help, however, if *In These Times* readers first appreciate the magnitude of our campaign to go directly to the community, labor and religious organizations (with a little help from local media sources) to, in turn, pressure Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke and the Baltimore City Council to do the several things necessary to create a nonprofit, policyholder-owned insurance co-op, which would provide auto and home insurance at cost.

As Shesgreen pointed out, "In Maryland alone, the auto insurance industry brings in more than \$2.4 billion a year in direct written premiums." Let us assume, as our studies indicate, that we can save an easy 20 percent for Maryland car owners. That's \$480 million a year. Adding home and apartment insurance would certainly bring that savings to more than half a billion a year.

But Maryland is small fry. Just suppose the 49 other states decided to follow our City Wide Insurance Coalition (CWIC) lead and run the private insurance industry out of the auto and home insurance business.

We're literally talking about eventual national yearly savings of \$20 billion or more in all—pioneered by a group of open socialists. It should therefore not surprise *ITT* readers that overwhelmingly powerful forces would oppose our efforts.

Their problem is, of course, that

they can't publicly fight us head-on. We've already out-organized them through five years of doggedly recruiting 180 dues-paying community organizations, whose members, as well as most of the rest of the community, know what we are about—and are very anxious for us to win.

Most of Baltimore's local politicians work for the establishment—whether they are intelligent enough to know it or not. Sure, most of them were smart enough to have presented a positive face to the public on our efforts—while some of them were quietly stabbing our effort in the back, and others cowardly went along with various scams, misrepresentations, slander and outright lies.

When Shesgreen writes that at a certain stage our "coalition had already started to dissolve," she means the local elected officials managed to twist and turn to appear good guys while sabotaging our effort. Our real 180-organization coalition remains steadfast.

The local establishment politicians don't dare admit that they are ready to punish Baltimore drivers because they don't like Bob Kaufman—CWIC's leader.

Why then should an *In These Times* writer spread their slander, i.e., "Kaufman's antics," "Kaufman's strong rhetoric and never-ending political aspirations." Kaufman's only political aspiration has been to build a movement that would unite the 90 percent who collectively own less wealth than our ruling 1 percent. That, indeed, is the single purpose of the two-year-old new and restructured City Wide Coalition (CWC).

Could it be possible that our message bothers the establishment?

Well, good news for *ITT* readers. Our two recent electoral campaigns—which certain City Hall denizens consider outlandish—have been exceedingly well received by Baltimoreans.

Shesgreen further writes that "many Baltimoreans dismiss him as an ineffective gadfly." That's what the *Baltimore Sun* called Kaufman—a "gadfly." They didn't dare suggest to its readers that Kaufman was ineffective.

As to my self-described "obnoxious personality"—what organizer isn't considered obnoxious by the oligarchy he/she fights. And why shouldn't they use "strong rhetoric"?

In the interim, the mayor wasted \$10,000 of taxpayers' money in a study designed to convince the Maryland General Assembly to equalize rates statewide by having non-Baltimore delegates raise the rates to drivers in their own counties.

As a byproduct of our efforts, incidentally, CWIC is responsible for two or more insurance companies offering county rates to Baltimore city zip codes that bisect the county line—already saving unknown thousands of Baltimore drivers unknown millions of dollars. We are also, as reported, working out arrangements with two major for-profit insurance companies to offer 10 to 12 percent reduced costs for community association members.

Finally, we are capping our seven-year effort to create a nonprofit insurance co-op by going back to the community organizations to pressure the mayor and the new city council to put a \$9 million loan on the ballot at the November 1998 election (which will pass with flying colors despite a predictable multimillion-dollar insurance company campaign to stop it). Public challenges have also prompted the business community, the foundations and the trade union-controlled pension funds to sign a guarantee note to the amount of \$21 million. (If they don't come through, the people will know why.)

It will then be up to the citizens to put the ball squarely in City Hall to make it happen and let the chips fall where they may. We don't know where the mayor's office came up with a \$40 million estimate. Our own \$21 million figure came from the State Insurance Commissioner.

If we win, it won't be because the mayor's office and the city council like us. It will be because we have organized the people well enough to make their elected officials do the right thing.

A. Robert Kaufman
Baltimore

Continued from page 23

information about Soviet nuclear policy circulated more freely, and scientists learned that the Soviets deliberately placed large nuclear reactors near big urban centers to make use of centralized steam heating from the reactors. With the gradual, inevitable corrosion in the steam pipes, we can speculate that Soviet urban dwellers have been directly exposed to the same fission products released in the Chernobyl accident that devastated Belarus and the Ukraine in 1986.

Because Russia has fewer old people than the United States, in 1970 its crude mortality rate was lower than that of the U.S., as shown by Figure 1. But by 1993 it exceeded the U.S. rate by 45 percent—a truly extraordinary epidemiological anomaly in so short a time period. According to Feshbach, Russian male life expectancy has dropped from about 65 years in 1986 to less than 58 years in 1994. Both of these findings point to the Chernobyl accident as an accelerating event in a larger deterioration in mortality rates that evidently began as far back as 1970, when Soviet nuclear reactors began to come on line.

As Andrei Sakharov related in his *Memoirs* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), he worried so much about the health effects of thermonuclear fallout that he predicted in 1958 that radioactive strontium—which did not exist in nature prior to the nuclear age—when ingested would cause both immediate and delayed harm to human immune systems. Khrushchev, intent on using Sakharov's thermonuclear bomb in the Cold War with the United States, found this prediction so unwelcome that he banished Sakharov from the Soviet nuclear establishment in 1961. (The more proximate cause of Sakharov's expulsion was his protest of Khrushchev's decision to test hydrogen bombs—Sakharov estimated that the tests could cause millions of premature deaths worldwide.) Sakharov's dismissal in many ways foreshadowed the self-imposed ignorance of Soviet officials of the health effects of ionizing radiation that eventually led to the Chernobyl disaster—the worst single nuclear accident in history, after which Soviet civil order collapsed.

Meanwhile, many observers continue to draw precisely

the wrong lessons from the Chernobyl disaster. The international nuclear establishment is reluctant to recognize that all reactors are potential candidates for similar meltdowns, and has eagerly accepted the myth that the Chernobyl accident killed only 31 persons. The epidemiological records suggest that Chernobyl gave the Soviet people a sudden vision of how their rulers had been lying to them about why they are dying so much earlier in the life cycle, and in such alarming numbers.

Nor should Americans assume that they don't share in the nuclear woes of Soviet citizens. It's true that the United States averted a Chernobyl-style catastrophe when the near-meltdown of Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island reactor was arrested in 1979. But as was the case with Chernobyl, the accident at Three Mile Island came in the midst of a long-term deteriora-

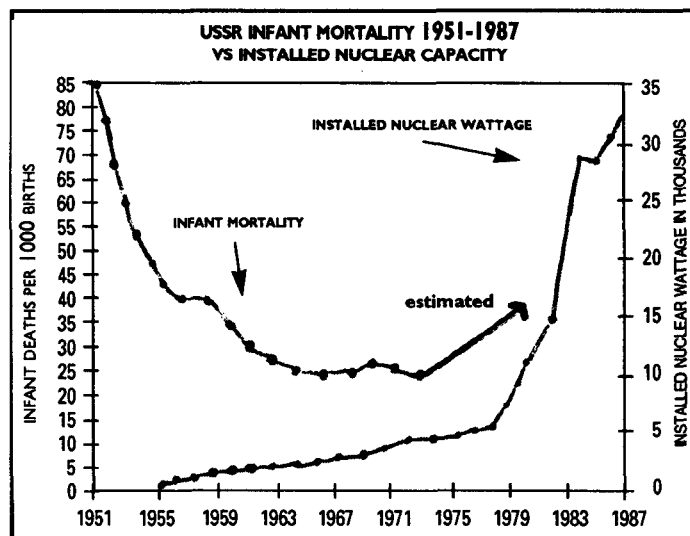
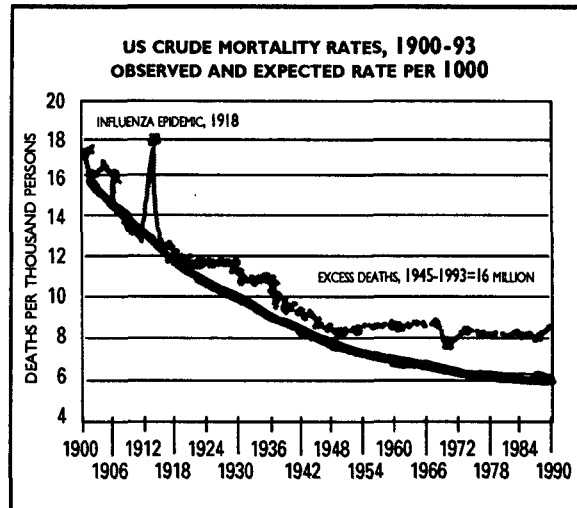
tion in mortality rates that characterizes the entire nuclear age. Figure 1 shows that U.S. mortality rates have shown no improvement in recent years, in sharp contrast to an average 2 percent annual improvement in the years preceding the birth of the nuclear age in 1945. Figure 3 shows that if that annual improvement had continued, the U.S.

mortality rate today would be six deaths per 1,000 persons instead of nine, and that there would have been 16 million fewer premature American deaths in the past 45 years.

The above three figures, which both describe and document the lethal health effects of low-level radiation, display the prescience of Robert Oppenheimer, who characterized the nuclear confrontation of the U.S. and the USSR as two scorpions in a bottle fated to sting each other to death.

Only Oppenheimer's image didn't fully account for the heavy casualties incurred from the civilian uses of nuclear power—the extent, in other words, to which the scorpions turned on themselves.

Jay M. Gould is the author of the forthcoming book *The Enemy Within: The High Cost of Living Near Nuclear Reactors* (Four Walls, Eight Windows). A former member of the EPA science advisory board in the Carter administration, he now directs the New York-based Radiation and Public Health Project.



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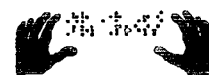
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Continued from page 40

ter presents a remarkably reassuring image of a working-class woman's plight: a compliant husband who happily takes her guff, part-ownership in a local diner—and, most recently, a regular stint as resident “blue-collar” commentator on a Chicago morning news show, where Roseanne Connor gets to say “anything she wants about any subject at all.” Nice work if you can get it.

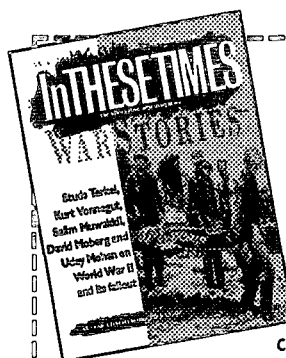
Meanwhile, the darker aspects of low-income (or, for that matter, middle-class) life—domestic violence, the threat of permanent joblessness, fear of growing old—are tellingly absent. If you don't believe these things are the provenance of situation comedy, check out just about any episode of *The Honeymooners*, which 40 years ago churned out a far scarier—and funnier—vision of working-class life than any sitcom today. The widely touted “realism” of *Roseanne* seems largely to consist of well-worn (some might say stereotypical) class markers. A print of those poker-playing dogs hangs on the wall of the Connors' living room, and a tacky homemade afghan is spread across the orange plaid couch. There's nary a book in sight. Dan and Roseanne drink beer and go bowling; they're loud and fat. It's a true vision of working-class life—if you're one of those high-brows watching from your own well-appointed living room.

And what about Roseanne Connor's much-heralded anger, the stuff that supposedly makes the show so real and pertinent to women? Consistently, she—together with the show's writers, who think up these creatures—vents it on the other female characters. Roseanne's sister Jackie has evolved into a simpering nitwit who melts into abject submission at the sight of an available man. Older daughter Becky is, as her mother often reminds her, a dope for running off and marrying a moron. The cheapest shots, however, are reserved for Roseanne's mother, an addled old woman whose mere appearance inevitably triggers a reign of unbearably cruel (and singularly unfunny) abuse. The real Roseanne's rage at her own mother (whom she's publicly accused of child abuse) is so transparent in these transactions that watching them is akin to watching the home movies of a deeply disturbed person—you feel ashamed and slightly ill. That's not comedy, it's pathology.

And it's the same emotion Roseanne evokes in real life whenever she rages about the torments that have made her a poster child for the self-help movement: the sexual abuse, the multiple personalities, the shattered marriages. She's attempted (successfully, it would seem) to turn all of that into a political statement about oppression; her life, she blares, is the life of every female under patriarchy. Finally, though, like the anger in her comedy, it's only personal. And not inconsequentially, deeply misogynistic. For example, Roseanne's numerous attacks on various “middle-class white” Hollywood actresses—Jodie Foster, Susan Sarandon, Demi Moore—typically boil down to puerile and pointless comments on their anatomy: their thinness, their breasts, their plastic surgeries. (Curious, for one who's gone under the knife more than a few times herself.) Surely there's more

to criticize about Hollywood's liberal establishment, but Roseanne is never one to spell out an agenda when she can rant instead. “They're all just upset about salaries, or something that feminism was about 25 years ago,” she's said about Foster and the others. And what is feminism about today? Roseanne doesn't say.

Sadly, the woman who began years ago as Roseanne Barr did have something to say. Her comedy was a sharp running commentary on the way power relations between the sexes play out in everyday life. Rude and specific, its target was ultimately the very culture we're all born into. Now, in sitcom-land, her shuck is just hostile humor directed at characters who have no more power than Roseanne Connor. Since she invented her Domestic Goddess, Roseanne has yet to come up with a single new comic persona; her weekly show has reinvented neither the form nor the content of traditional TV comedy. Her *Saturday Night Special*, which she noisily hawked as the alternative to “white-guy college humor” of *Saturday Night Live*, was a tired rehash of *Saturday Night Live* white-guy college humor. Her tirades against the prevailing culture of thinness in Hollywood—a worthy object of scorn—inevitably devolve into attacks on anyone who does not look or act like Roseanne. She has nothing fresh or risky to say about the conditions under which most ordinary women live their lives. And that's just fine with the critical cognoscenti and the screenwriters who slum in the heartland. ▲



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 N T H E E N

By Linda DeLibero

My Roseanne Problem—and Ours

Ten years after stepping into the national limelight, Roseanne—tabloid queen, TV star, high priestess of pop feminism—is a household name, darling to an improbably wide fandom that includes everyone from academics to auto mechanics. Her wildly popular sitcom will enter its ninth and final season next year—final only because the star wishes to pursue bigger and better projects, such as producing the late-night comedy show, *Saturday Night Special*, which debuted this month. She is the most powerful, well-paid woman in Hollywood, and Roseanne's triumph is singular and groundbreaking by anyone's standards. But the comedienne lays claim to considerably more than big-deal clout in a male-dominated arena. Long after show business has lavishly rewarded her for parlaying "outrageousness" into unprecedented success, Roseanne still clings to the idea of herself as an outsider, a rebel spokeswoman for the disenfranchised—specifically, for working-class women.

It's an identity that's gotten a boost from the toniest places, most recently during the flap over her appointment by Tina Brown as a "guest consultant" on the "Women's Issue" of *The New Yorker*. When two well-known staff writers, Ian Frazier and Jamaica Kincaid, quit in protest, *New Yorker* media critic James Wolcott issued a defense that boiled down to this: Resistance to the idea of Roseanne as a feminist, working-class icon is bourgeois snobbery, pure and simple. "Highbrows and lowbrows 'get' Roseanne," intoned Wolcott. "It's the militant middlebrows who deplore her." Put aside the fact that only in the world of Tina Brown could Wolcott—a glorified TV columnist—deem himself a member of the first category, while distinguished writers like Kincaid and Frazier are strictly midcult. And put aside, too, the consideration that such distinctions have been highly arbitrary since about 1962. The "snob" charge is a convenient screen for celebrity-mongering. As the *New York Observer* wryly observed, Brown hired a TV personality for a job any Sassy intern could do.

But no matter: Wield the big club of sexism and "classism," and even the most determined critics will shut up. Roseanne herself has consistently used it against her detractors, a strategy that shields her from some fairly pertinent questions—like, what exactly has she done for women, anyway? Granted, in her early years on the comedy club circuit, Roseanne single-handedly blasted apart a female stand-up tradition that, with few exceptions, was peopled by well-dressed, polite young ladies telling mild jokes about hairdos and boyfriends. In recent memory, only Joan Rivers had dared to be half so crude and Phyllis Diller so unkempt. Roseanne outdid them on both counts: she was fat and nasty, angry and obscene—as well as obscenely funny. She shocked her audiences into submission, blowing the lid off the repressed frustrations of housewives everywhere; challenging every received notion of femininity. She fashioned herself as a maverick who spoke the unwieldy, unconscious truths lurking beneath the surface of ordinary life.

But once Roseanne hit network prime time, her Domestic Goddess character was necessarily watered down, purged of its transgressive fury. Roseanne Connor is a wiseacre and a loudmouth, but she's no iconoclast. The jokes are standard sitcom fare, a tad crude but seldom topical; the situations revolve mostly around Roseanne keeping husband and kids firmly under control. Altogether, the charac-

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